Amina Adil
Lore of Light

حياة الأنبياء

AMINA ADIL

LORE OF LIGHT

STORIES FROM THE LIVES OF THE PROPHETS, BASED ON ANCIENT ARAB AND TURKISH SOURCES

FROM ĀDAM TO ʻĪSĀ

عليهم السلام

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بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

THESE STORIES of the lives of the prophets from Adam to Jesus – peace be upon them all – based on ancient Arabic and Turkish sources, can be appreciated for their immediacy and linguistic liveliness alone. They are, however, the faithful testimony, as preserved by Islamic tradition, of events that Allah Almighty visited upon His messengers who are examples of His mercy and the most remarkable among His creatures. They may serve us all as admonition, edification and guidance, great and small, delightful and terrifying, including some stories that have hardly ever been heard in the West.

It is our pleasure to make Ḥajja Āmina's much-loved book, which has been out of print for some time, available again to the English-speaking reader in a handsome edition. Our heartfelt thanks goes not only to Ḥajja Rukiye and Sheikh Mehmet Efendi, who entrusted us with this task, but also and especially to Ḥajja Radhia Shukrullah who has reviewed the entire text by comparing the last published edition with the original version, originally transcribed from the late Ḥajja Āmina's spoken word and translated from Arabic and Turkish into English many years ago, completing this task with remarkable energy and due diligence,

We wish our readers a refreshing read.

Wa min Allah at-tawfīq.

Lympia/Cyprus,
In October 2020, Rabī'a al-Awwal 1442

SALIM AND HAGAR SPOHR

NAMES OF THE PROPHETS عليهم السلام

Transcription of Arabic Names	English Names
Ādam	Adam
Shīth	Seth
Idrīs, Akhnūkh	Enoch
Nūḥ	Noah
Hūd	Hud
Ibrāhīm	Abraham
Lūṭ	Lot
Ismā'īl	Ishmael
Isḥāq	Isaac
Ya'qūb	Jacob
Yūsuf	Joseph
Ayyūb	Job
Dhu l-Kifl (Bishr)	Ezekiel
Shu'ayb	Jethro
Mūsā	Moses
Hārūn	Aaron
Yūsha'	Joshua
Ṣamū'īl	Samuel
Dā'ūd	David
Sulaymān	Salomon
Ilyās	Elijah = Elias
Alyasa'	Elisha
Yūnus	Jonas
Iskandar (Dhu l-Qarnayn)	Alexander, the Two-Horned One
Sha'ya	Isaiah
Armiyā	Jeremiah
Dānyāl	Daniel
'Uzayr	Ezra
Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Yaḥyā	John the Baptist
'Īsā (al-Masīḥ)	Jesus (the Messias)
Muḥammad	Mohammed or Muhammad

PART I

Eulogia:

ﷻ *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*, glorious and sublime is He (after the mention of Allah Almighty)

ﷺ *ṣallā llāhu alayhi wa sallam*, Allāh bless him and grant him peace (after the mention of Sayyidinā Muḥammad)

ﷺ *alayhi s-salām*, peace be upon him (at the mention of a prophet)

ﷺ *'alayhim s-salām*, peace be upon them (at the mention of several prophets)

ﷺ *raḍiya llāhu 'anhu*, may Allāh be satisfied with him (at the mention of a prophet's companion)

ﷺ *raḍiya llāhu 'anhā*, may Allāh be satisfied with her (at the mention of a prophet's female companion)

ﷺ *qaddasa llāhu sirrahu*, may Allāh sanctify his soul

ﷺ *karrama llāhu wajhahu*, may Allah honour him (used almost exclusively to honour Sayyidinā 'Alī)

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

I — THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE

N THE BEGINNING Allah Almighty ﷻ created Mind. He said to Mind, "Go!" and it went, He said, "Come!" and it came.

He said, "Speak" and it spoke, He said, "Be quiet!" and it was silent. The Lord then said: "By My Glory and My Majesty, by My Sublimity and Grace, I have created no servant more pleasing than you, and I have given you naught better than patience."

SAYYIDUNĀ 'ALĪ كرم الله وجهه reports: "The Lord created Mind from a hidden light. At first it was hidden and Allah wished it to shine forth. So He equipped it with Knowledge, and He gave its soul Discernment. He placed Asceticism on its head, and Modesty in its eyes, Wisdom upon its tongue, Gnosis within its ears, Kindness and Compassion in its heart, lofty Aspiration in its spirit and Patience in its essence. Allah decorated Mind with all the attributes of perfection, for the light of Mind is spiritual, and it belongs to the spirit of man, the Children of Ādam. It has its place in the hearts' secret, and this secret always aspires to the highest spiritual station. Mind by itself cannot know such aspiration; only with the secret which Allah gave to man can it reach that far. By itself it cannot climb, it has no particular will or inclination, but with the secret which Allah gave to the Children of Ādam it can attain to those high stations."

The Lord spoke to Mind: "O Mind, look who is before you," Mind looked and beheld a very beautiful being, and asked: "Who are you, so fine and so beautiful?" This being answered: "O Mind, without me you have no rank or standing." "What

is your name?" "My name is Divinely granted Success, Success from the Lord of the Worlds."

The Lord created the Pen and He spoke to the Pen: "Write!" The Pen said: "O Lord, what shall I write?"

„Write that which was and that which will be ..." The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: "In the beginning the Lord created the Pen from a jewel, the size of which was 500 years in length. Its nib was split and from it issued light, as ink issues from the nibs of our pens. The end of the Pen was attached to the Throne, and it was given into the hands of the angels. Each letter they wrote was as big as the Jabal (Mount) Qāf, that is to say, it was gigantic."

From AL-'ABBĀS ﷺ: First Allah Almighty created the Pen and the Tablets. He said to the Pen, "Write!" The Pen asked, "What shall I write?" "Write that which is, which was and that which will be!" commanded the Lord. Allah created the Tablets from white pearl and every day they change into 360 different colours. The Pen asked: "What shall I write?" The Lord answered: "Write: *lā ilāha illā llāh, Muḥammadu r-rasūlullāh,* there is no god but Allah, Muḥammad is Allah's Messenger. Whoever is contented with My Decree, patient with My Trials, thankful for My Favours, him I shall write among the Righteous."

On the Day of Resurrection Allah Almighty will raise them along with the prophets in the Station of the Righteous. And He says of those who do not suffer His trials patiently, who give not thanks for His Favours and who are not content with His Decrees that they "rise up from the sod, seeking equality with God," and this is sacrilege.

The Pen began to write. What did it write? It wrote: "Intercession is given to the prophets, miracles are given to the saints, love of God is given to the pious and paradise is given to the generous."

The Lord said to the Pen: "Write!" "What shall I write, oh my Lord?" "Write: *Bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm, in* the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate."

The Pen wrote the *bā'*, the first letter of *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm,* the *basmala,* and light spread out from this letter, from

the Throne to the farthest corner of the Universe. All was lit up by this light. The Pen wondered and asked the Lord: "What is this light?" The Lord answered: "This is the light which I wish to give to the Nation of Muḥammad which will read these letters, I bestow it upon them from My endless Bounty." The Pen then wrote the next letter which was the *sīn*. The letter *sīn* has three peaks or teeth, and from each one of these a different kind of light issued forth: from the first peak a light which reached up to the Throne, from the second one a light which reached the Divine Court, and from the third a light which reached up to paradise (*janna*). "What is this Light, O my Lord?" wondered the Pen. "There will be three groups among the Children of Ādam. Firstly there will be those who vie with one another for the performance of good deeds; this means, those whose hidden reality is better than that which they show outwardly. The light of this group reaches up to the Divine Throne. Secondly, there is a group whose inner reality is on equal footing with their outer manifestation, and their light will reach up to the Divine Court. The third group are those who have wronged their own souls, that is to say, those whose outer aspect overcomes their inward reality. The light of this last group reaches up to Paradise, (after they have been purged in hell)."

Again the Lord commanded the Pen to write. The Pen wrote *mīm*, (the third letter of the *basmala*). The light that this *mīm* effused illuminated the whole world. The Pen was so surprised that it opened its mouth wide, as wide as it could and remained stupefied for 2000 years. Then it asked: "What is this light?" "This is the light of Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ," said the Lord." *Mīm* is the first letter of the name of Muḥammad ﷺ, My Beloved, the Prince of Messengers and the Crown of all Creation. I have created the world for his sake alone." When the Pen heard these words, it said, "O Lord, teach me to give him *salāms*, greetings of peace." The Lord taught the Pen to say, "*As-salāmu ʿalayka, yā rasūlallāh*, peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allah." The Pen saluted him thus and waited silently, but no answer came to him. Then it said, "O Lord, nobody

answers me; Your Beloved, the Crown of Creation, does not return my *salāms*!" The Lord said, "O Pen, he is not yet created, if he were present at this moment, he would certainly return your greetings. But I will reply in his stead: *wa 'alayka as-salām, yā qalam,* and peace be upon you, O Pen." Therefore, it is *sunna* (commendable practice) to give *salāms*, and it is *wājib* (obligatory) to return them. The first being ever to give *salāms* was the Pen, and the first to answer them was the Lord of the Worlds. If one does not give *salāms*, it is not a great sin, but if one fails to return the *salāms* given, it is a sin the responsibility for which falls on everyone present. Likewise, it is sufficient for one person in a group to return the greetings, one person may fulfill this obligation in the name of all present.

Then the Pen wrote, *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm* and it asked, "O Lord, what is this mighty Name?" The Lord answered, "The Name of Allah is for the People of Remembrance, the *ahl-i dhikr*, those pious ones who are incessantly engaged in the Remembrance of their Lord and who vie with one another in the performance of good works. The Divine Name *ar-raḥmān* nourishes and sustains all who are in the world without distinction, be they Christians, Jews, unbelievers or others, they all receive their provisions from the manifestation of the Holy Name *ar-raḥmān. Ar-raḥīm* is reserved for the Muslim Nation on the Day of Judgement, as it is written: "*Peace — such is the greeting from the Lord All Compassionate.*" [Yā Sīn, 36:58] All My servants' sins will be forgiven by the blessing of that Holy Name; whenever any action is begun with the phrase *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*, the endeavour is blessed, and I grant My servant success and forgiveness for his failings."

Next the Lord commanded the Pen to write: *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabbi l-'alamīn,* the first verse of *al-Fātiḥa,* the opening chapter of the Holy Qur'ān which means: Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all Being. The Pen wrote it and a great light shone forth from this line. This light was divided into two: one part of it formed the ocean of mercy, the other the sea of forgiveness, The Lord then ordered the soul of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, "Enter into these two oceans!" Thus he became a 'Mercy to the

Worlds', as it is written in this verse: "*We have not sent thee, save as a mercy unto all beings.*" [The Prophets, 21:107]

Again the Lord ordered the Pen, "Write!" "What shall I write?" "Write: *māliki yawmi d-dīn,* Master of the Day of Doom, the fourth verse of the opening chapter, *al-Fātiḥa.*" The Pen wrote and from these words issued forth darkness and light mixed together, and they separated from each other and each took to one side. From this light the Lord created the Sea of Bliss and from the darkness the Sea of Misery. "Whoever pronounces these words," said He, "I will bring him out of the Sea of Miseries into the Sea of Bliss, that there he may abide forever." Then the Almighty ordered the Pen to write: *iyyāka naʿbudu wa iyyāka nastaʿīn,* which means, Thee only do we serve, to Thee alone we pray for succour. From this phrase a twofold light issued forth; from one part Allah created the Ocean of (Divinely granted) Success, and from the other part the Ocean of Virtue, He said, "Whoever recites this verse, him I will give success and virtue as his companions."

Again the Lord ordered the Pen to write. It wrote: *ihdinā ṣ-ṣirata l-mustaqīm, ṣirāta l-ladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim,* guide us in the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed. The light coming from these words fell into two parts. From one part was created the Sea of Guidance and from the other part the Sea of Plenty. "Whoever speaks these words," spoke the Lord, "him I shall guide, and him I shall provide with My bounty."

Once more He ordered the Pen to write. And the Pen wrote: *ghayri l-maghḍūbi ʿalayhim wa lā ḍ-ḍāllīn,* which means: not of those against whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

And a darkness rose up from these words, and this, too, was in two parts. Out of one part was created the Sea of Wrath, of the other the Sea of Anger. The Lord spoke, "I will make safe from the Seas of Wrath and Anger whomever recites these verses." And thus the verses of *al-Fātiḥa* were written down by the Pen at the beginning of Creation.

The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: "It took the Pen seven hundred years to write down the *basmala,* the words *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni*

r-raḥīm. If a Muslim recites the *basmala* with pure intention in his heart, it will be counted as seven hundred years of worship." The Holy Prophet ﷺ also said, "Allah created mankind in the midst of darkness, then He showered light upon them. All those who were touched by this light reached to guidance, those who were not touched by it, remained in error." The Holy Prophet ﷺ was asked by his Companions: "What shall we answer when they ask us about the beginnings of Creation?" He answered them, "Say, the first thing to have been created was the mind of Muḥammad, then the soul of Muḥammad, then the Light of Muḥammad; thereafter the Pen and the Tablets."

After this the Lord created the Divine Throne from a green gem. It has 70,000 tongues, and each tongue praises the Lord in a different language. Then He created another green gem, and He gazed upon it with the Gaze of Awe which caused it to liquefy, and it began to boil. From this He created the whole Universe and He placed it above the wind. Then the Lord placed Himself upon the Divine Throne, in the Seat of Command. Thereupon the Throne became very proud of itself and inclined towards conceit. The Lord loves not the conceited, so He created a snake with a head of white pearl and eyes of rubies red. This snake had 70,000 faces, each face had 70,000 tongues, each tongue spoke in 70,000 languages, and all of these were praising the Lord. The Throne then realized that this snake was a creature more marvelous than itself, and the Lord made the snake twine around the Throne with half of its length, the other half hung down below. The Divine Throne itself is huge, between each of its pillars there is a distance of 30,000 years, as a bird might fly. But in relation to the whole of the Universe it is as if a tiny ring had fallen into a vast desert. After this, Allah Almighty created four angels to raise up the Throne and to bear it aloft. And on the Day of Judgement they will be eight, as the Lord Himself has spoken: "*Upon that day eight shall carry above them the Throne of thy Lord*" [The Indubitable, 69:17].

At first they could not lift up the Throne, so they asked all the angels to come and help them, but even their combined efforts

could not lift the weight of the Throne. The Lord said, "Speak the words: *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bi-llāhi l-'aliyyi l-'aẓīm,* and when they spoke these words, those four angels were able to lift up the Throne, but it is not known whether the angels lifted the Throne or whether the Throne lifted the angels. These four Throne bearers are called the *Qurābiyyūn.* Their heads are below the Throne while their feet reach down to the lowest of the seven earths.

The Holy Prophet ﷺ spoke: "The Lord wrote these words on the base of His Divine Throne: 'Whoso obeys Me, I shall do as he likes; and whoso remembers Me, I shall remember him; and who seeks from Me forgiveness, I shall forgive him, and whoever is thankful to Me, I shall give him increase.'"

And the Holy Prophet ﷺ also spoke: "I shall inform you of the size of the Throne. It has 360,000 pillars, and between each two pillars there are 70,000 worlds. In each world there are 360,000 deserts and 360,000 cities, but nobody but Allah Almighty knows who lives in all those places."

Then Allah Almighty created the soul, *rūḥ,* and no one can know it but the Almighty Lord. It is written in the *Tafsīr al-Qāḍī*: "Allah Almighty created the soul as a gem which does not perish for it is made of the Divine Essence."

According to these Qur'ānic verses: "*Count not those who were slain in Allah's way as dead, but rather living with their Lord, by Him provided.*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:169]

The body passes away, not so the soul, but all men are ignorant of the soul's secret. IMĀM GHAZZĀLĪ has said that the soul is like the body of man, except that it is finer and far more beautiful and perfect. Reward and punishment are dealt out to body and soul alike.

The Lord created two groups of souls, the higher and the lower souls. The higher souls belong to the angels and to mankind. The lower souls belong to the Jinn and the devils. The spirits of plants and animals are of nature, they live and they die and are returned to nature without reward or punishment.

Then the Lord created the Divine Court, and its splendours are untold. Compared to its immensity, all the seven heavens

and the seven earths are as a tiny ring lost in a huge desert, but in relation to the Divine Throne it is nothing but a single pearl dropped into the limitless ocean.

The Holy Prophet ﷺ beheld it during his Night Journey and his Ascension to the Throne. It is situated immediately below the Throne. "*So glory be to Him, in Whose hand is the dominion of everything, and unto Whom you shall be returned.*" [Yā Sīn, 36:83]

The Lord created the air and the wind which has so many wings, Allah only knows their number. Then He created the water. Wind stirs the water and it surges up in waves. From the waves rise vapour and steam, and these become the foam of the sea. And this sea became solid, by the Command of the Almighty, and there were formed from it mountains, firmly grounded, as many mountains as there had been waves. And Allah alone knows their number. Then the Lord created Jabal Qāf which surrounds the whole world, as if it were wrapped around it, and it is made all of green stone.

Said the Holy Prophet ﷺ: The Lord created the worlds before creating mankind, and He created the Angels and the Jinn. These creatures all glorified their Lord, saying *lā ilāha illā llāh, Muḥammadu r-rasūlullāh.*

But even then there were among them some disobedient to their Lord. One of the Jinn was called 'Azāzīl (later he came to be called Iblīs), and he worshipped the Lord more than any of the others, he was the best of their number. So the Lord gave him a pair of wings that he could fly up and join the angels and learn from them their ways. Once the Lord ordered them to make war on the disobedient, and in the battle they were defeated. 'Azāzīl was at the head of the fighters, and upon their victory, pride took hold of his heart.

'Azāzīl had worshipped the Lord for 40,000 years in heaven, 40,000 years on the earths and for 40,000 years in paradise.

SHĀH NAQSHBAND ق has said: "Had I found one place on earth or in the heavens where Iblīs had not placed his forehead in *sajda,* prostration in prayer, I would have hidden the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ there. But there was not one place, upon which he had not prostrated himself."

But throughout those many long years of worship, 'Azāzīl prayed and prostrated himself only according to his own will, never according to any command. Once only did the Lord order him to make a single prostration before Ādam ﷺ, and he disobeyed and for that he was damned.

The Lord created the earths in layers one upon the other, and between them He let scorching, barren winds blow. The last layer of the earths is made of sulphur which will fuel hell for the unbelievers.

After having created all the heavens and the earths, Allah Almighty ordered an angel to pick up and carry the whole of creation. So that the angel's feet might not be suspended in empty space. He placed beneath them a stone of red ruby which was brought from the highest paradise. Beneath the ruby He placed a huge bull who carried the ruby and the angel and all the heavens and the earths between his horns. The bull stood on a dome, and the dome rested on the back of a fish. This fish is swimming in an ocean, and the ocean is surrounded by air which is blown by a mighty wind, so that, by the Will of the Almighty everything revolves in orbit.

As this verse of the Holy Qur'ān describes: "*It is He Who created the night and the day, the sun and the moon, each swimming in a sky.*" [The Prophets, 21:33]

'ABDULLĀH IBN 'ABBĀS ﷺ relates: Below the Divine Throne and above the seven heavens there is a river. This river is of light and is reserved for the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ. He dips his wings into it, and from every drop that falls off them when he shakes his feathers, Allah Almighty creates an angel which circumambulates the Heavenly House, the *baytu l-ma'mūr,* until the Day of Judgement.

From KA'B AL-AḤBĀR: "The Lord created the angel Isrāfīl ﷺ (who inscribed the Preserved Tablets before all things), then He created Jibrā'īl ﷺ, Mīkā'īl ﷺ and 'Azrā'īl ﷺ who are the archangels and the Messengers among all the angels.

Isrāfīl ﷺ has four wings, one to the east, one to the west, one above the seven heavens, and one that shields his face from the Majesty of the Lord. Isrāfīl's ﷺ head is above the Divine

Throne, his feet are below the seven earths. He has the most beautiful voice among all the angels; he is among the angels as Da'ūd was among men.

Five hundred years later the Lord created Jibrā'īl ﷺ, the most highly favoured of the angels, whom He calls 'the loyal spirit' or 'the Lord's favourite'. Jibrā'īl is the bearer of the Divine Revelation to the prophets of mankind. He has 600 wings, and each one is made of a different kind of precious material, pearls, gems, multi-coloured jewels, and none but Allah knows their great beauty. Among his 600 wings there is one that has an especially distinct ornament, and because of this, Jibrā'īl ﷺ is also known as the 'Peacock of the Angels'. Allah Almighty has appointed him to be the rouser of earth-quakes."

From 'ABDULLĀH IBN 'ABBĀS ﷺ who relates from the Holy Prophet ﷺ: "The Angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ used to show himself to the Prophet in the shape of a very beautiful person, resembling a man by the name of Daḥyat al-Kalbī. One day the Prophet ﷺ asked to see the angel in his own original form. Jibrā'īl ﷺ said: 'You cannot comprehend me in my own form.' 'But I must see you,' said the Prophet ﷺ. One day at 'Arafāt, the Prophet ﷺ beheld a vision which covered all the expanse of the horizon, from the East to the West, and he fainted from fear. When he recovered, the angel clasped him to his breast, having again assumed the shape of a man, and said: 'Do not fear, O Messenger of Allah, it is your friend, Jibrā'īl ﷺ.'"

After another five hundred years Allah Almighty created the Angel Mīkā'īl ﷺ. He has two wings of precious chrysolite and other gems, and 1000 faces. Each face has 1000 mouths and with each mouth he praises the Lord and transfers the rewards to the believers. He has a million eyes, and each of these eyes cries for those who disobey the Lord, and he asks forgiveness for them. From every drop that falls from the eyes of the angel Mīkā'īl ﷺ, the Lord creates other angels who sing His praises and pray for forgiveness for the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ.

Five hundred years later, the Lord of the Worlds created 'Azrā'īl ﷺ, the Angel of Death. His place is between the heav-

ens and the earth, but is also related that he resides in the first heaven. He is always facing the Preserved Tablets, the Plates of Destiny. With his right hand he takes hold of the souls of the believers when they die and he places them into 'Illiyūn, a blissful place in paradise. With his left hand he seizes the souls of the disobedient and unbelievers and he throws them into Sijjīn, a place in hell.

The Lord of the Worlds created the angels called the *kirāmu l-kātibīn*, the Noble Scribes, and the *muqarrabīn*, who are intended for the correction of mankind. They write down all the good and the evil that has been done. The good deeds are written down by the angels on the right: as soon as one good deed is performed, it is written down tenfold, at the very least, that is to say, as meriting a tenfold reward, and some sources say 700, some 4,000. The angels to the right are always busy writing down these good deeds until they grow weary of writing and can write no more. The Lord Himself then takes over, and nobody but He, the Creator of all creatures can know how much they will be given by their Lord. As it is written:

"*... and Allah provides whomsoever He will without reckoning.*" [The Cow, 2:212]

As for the recording angel on the left, he is under the command of the angel on the right. Every time a sin is committed, he asks: "O right-hand angel, have I permission to write down this sin?" And the angel on the right says: "No! Do not write it down yet. Wait, maybe he will feel remorse, maybe he will repent, maybe he will perform a good deed that makes up for it, perhaps he will make an ablution, pray two *rak'ats*, give *salāms* to the Prophet ﷺ, or read Qur'ān — and the Lord may perhaps forgive him before this bad action is written down." Engaged in this discussion, the angels wait for a full seven hours. If the person after seven hours shows no sign of repentance and makes no reparation for his failing, the left-hand angel will write down the deed, once.

Every person has about him four of these recording angels, the *kirāmu l-kātibīn*, two of them come to him in the morning and stay with him until nightfall, then the other two take over

the shift until daybreak. Each of these four angels has 640 other angels to witness what he is writing, and they never leave him.

Above the seventh heaven and facing the Divine Throne, the Lord created the Heavenly House, the *baytu l-ma'mūr*. It stands exactly above that place on earth where the much honoured Ka'ba is now standing, only unfathomably high above it. Every day, 70,000 angels circumambulate this shrine seven times and they pray there. Near it is a river of light in which the angels bathe and don their *iḥrām*, their pilgrim's garb, of light. When they are finished, other angels take their place, and there will be no moment, until the Last Day, when the *ṭawāf* of the angels will be interrupted.

The Heavenly House was created in Paradise, and it was brought down to the earth where it stood until the time of Nūḥ's عليه السلام flood.

From MUJĀHID: "Allah Almighty created the sun from the light of the Throne, and from the veil around the Throne He created the moon. In the beginning, the light of the sun and the moon were equal, there was no distinction between day and night. However, the Lord wished that His servants might find rest and repose during their sleep in the night, so He bade the Angel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام to brush the face of the moon with his wing, and when he did so, he added its light to the light of the sun. When we look at the full moon now, we can clearly see the valleys, marshes and craters of the moon — those are the traces of the angel's wing."

The Lord created Paradise, *janna*, below the Divine Throne. For this reason the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said: "The roof of Paradise, *janna* is the base of the Divine Throne." And Paradise was created with all manners of delights, known and unknown marvels, and gushing streams of the waters of Kāfūr and Salsabīl, of milk and wine and honey. The Holy Prophet ﷺ was shown these wonders on his ascension to the heavens, the *mi'rāj*. He saw these four rivers streaming by separately and yet springing from a common source. This source was housed underneath a dome. He asked the angel: "What is under this dome?" The angel answered: "O Messenger of Allah, you have the key. It is *lā*

ilāha illā llāh, Muḥammadu r-rasūlullāh." He ﷺ spoke these words and entered into the dome where he saw a river springing from each one of the walls. Around the circumference of the dome was written, *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm.* From the eye of the first *mīm* sprang the river of milk, out of the mouth of the *ha* of 'Allah' the river of wine, from the eye of the second *mīm* flowed the river of honey, and out of the last *mīm* (of *raḥīm*) the waters of the river of Salsabīl. The angel explained that the Lord would reward all those who say *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm* with a draught from those paradise streams.

When the Almighty had created Paradise with all its delights and adorned it with all its unspeakable splendour, the *janna* said: "*Ṭūbā*, great joy to whomever enters me!" The Lord of the Worlds then spoke and said: "O *janna*, by My Name, and by the Might, Power and Glory pertaining to Me, there are eight groups of persons I will not suffer to dwell within your blessed confines, until they have repented and returned to their Lord: firstly, the wine-drinkers; secondly, the adulterers. Thirdly, those who wink and make derisive gestures with their eves; fourthly, those who have no zeal for the sake of Islam, fifthly, the oppressors. The sixth group are the calumniators, the seventh those who cut off the bonds of kinship, the eighth, those who break their promise. All of these shall not enter paradise until they have repented and asked for forgiveness."

WAHB IBN AL-MUNABBIH reports that he asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ: "O Messenger of Allah, of what did the Lord create paradise?" The blessed Prophet ﷺ answered, "Allah Almighty created Paradise from many kinds of gems, and also of water. The *janna* has a wall made of gold, and a wall made of silver, a wall made of diamond and a wall made of ruby. Its buildings are constructed of unimaginable precious materials. The soil of the *janna* is of musk and its clay is of saffron, its pebbles are of topaz and beryl. Those who reach paradise will dwell therein forevermore, and they will not come forth again, being eternally beloved by their Lord."

The Lord also created Hell, full of scores of torments and multiple horror. Hell has seven gates. To each gate there are

70 mountains, and on each mountain there are 70 castles. To every castle there are 70 doors, and behind each door there are 70 types of punishment. Among these are chains and whips and fetters and hooks of molten iron. The dwellers of Hell will be given the fruit of the *zaqqūm* tree to eat and are made to drink boiling water. The Holy Prophet ﷺ saw the gate to the first hell which is called *Jahannam* and is reserved for the disobedient among the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ, those Muslims who commit greater sins and do not repent of them, though they are still counted among the people of the faith. They are placed in hell and punished there. The very lightest of their castigations will he that they are made to wear sandals made of the fire of hell. With these sandals strapped to their feet, their insides will heat up to such a degree that their teeth will begin to glow from within like red-hot iron, and their brains will begin to boil.

The second division of Hell is called *Huṭama*. It is the hell into which the Jews are driven by Gog and Magog. The third section is *Jaḥīm*, and it is for the Christians and the idol worshippers. The fourth Hell is called *Sa'īr*, and it is reserved for the devils and for those who worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars. The fifth hell is called *Laẓẓā*, and it is for those who associate partners with Allah.

Abū Hurayra ﷺ relates that the Holy Prophet ﷺ once explained to him that the fire of hell is 70 times hotter than the hottest fire on earth. "I asked him," he says, "O Messenger of Allah, is the fire on earth not hot enough, we all know how much it hurts us when we burn ourselves even a little?" The Holy Prophet ﷺ answered him and said, "It is so much hotter so that the punishment of the unbelievers might be increased."

The Lord of the Worlds ordered the guardians of hell to stoke its fires, and they stoked them for a thousand years until the fire was white-hot. Then He ordered them to continue their stoking for another thousand years, and the fire became red-hot, like molten iron. Thereafter He ordered them to stoke it yet another thousand years, and from the excessive heat it turned all black. As the Lord says: "And fear the fire prepared for the unbelievers." [The House of 'Imrān, 3:131]

From WAHB IBN AL-MUNABBIH: "The Lord of the Worlds created the fire of *Samūm.* From this fire of *Samūm* He created the Jinn. '*And the Jinn created We before of fire flaming.*' [Al-Hijr, 15:27] The first of the Jinn was named Mārij and the Lord created a second one to be his wife, and she was named Mārija. They had a son and they called him Jinn. From them are derived all the clans of the Jinn, including Iblīs. And the Lord gave them the earth to dwell therein and they lived and worshipped there for a long time. So much did they worship that the angels grew amazed, and said to the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth, 'O our Lord, raise them up to heaven, so that we might learn from them and follow their good example.' So the Lord brought Iblīs, then 'Azāzīl, up to be among the angels and he lived with them in the first heaven. Others remained living on earth and remained righteous, while a number of them became sinners and transgressed the law, as did the children of Ādam عليه السلام after them."

"And the earth began to complain of them to the Lord: 'O my Lord, have you created me that I should be peopled by disobedient folk?' The Lord answered: 'O Earth, be patient, I shall send prophets among them to lead them back to the straight path,' for until that time no prophets had yet appeared among the Jinn. The Lord sent to them 800 prophets and they killed each one. At last the Lord spoke to 'Azāzīl in the first heaven, and He said to him: 'Go, 'Azāzīl, go and fight the unbelievers of your people living on the earth.' 'Azāzīl obeyed and descended onto the earth and fought with the unbelievers, vanquishing them. Then the Lord sent down a fire from the skies and it consumed them, so not a trace remained. The only Jinn left alive were the believing and worshipping Jinn."

"Again 'Azāzīl prayed so eagerly that he was raised up into the first heaven, or, according to another narration, he worshipped so much in the first heaven that he was raised up through all the seven heavens and above them. He worshipped on the earth, he worshipped in the heavens, until Ādam عليه السلام was brought into existence. Then the Lord ordered all the angels to bow down before Ādam عليه السلام, and all the angels obeyed except

Iblīs. '*So they bowed themselves, save Iblīs, he refused and waxed proud, and so he became one of the unbelievers.*' [The Cow, 2:34]"

From Ḥasan al-Baṣrī ﷺ: "Iblīs worshipped above the seven heavens for more than 70,000 years, until he was raised to the station of Riḍwān which is a very high station, Riḍwān being the guardian of Paradise. Iblīs was the guardian of paradise for 1000 years. Once he read an inscription on the gates of paradise, and it read: 'There is a servant among the most highly favoured servants of the Almighty Lord, and for a long time he will be obedient and serve his Lord well; there will come a day, however, on which he will oppose his Lord and disobey, and he will be driven from His gates and be cursed.' Iblīs, who was then still called 'Azāzīl, read and wondered at this prediction.

'How can that be,' he asked, 'that one of the closest servants to the Lord should grow disobedient to the Lord of the Worlds and be driven from His Holy Nearness? O Lord,' he pleaded, 'give me permission to curse that rebellious one, whoever he may be.' The Lord gave him permission, and Iblīs showered curses upon that future sinner for one thousand years, knowing not that it was to be himself."

There is a conflict of opinion between people as to whether Iblīs was of the angels or of the Jinn. But it is written in the Holy Qur'ān, '*He was one of the Jinn and committed ungodliness against his Lord's command*' [The Cave, 18:50]. Because of his extreme virtue and the intensity of his prayers the Lord raised him up into the heavens to live among the angels. When the Lord ordered them all to bow down and prostrate before Ādam ﷺ, he refused and his hidden disobedience was exposed.

This then was the order of the Creation: first of all Reason was created, then the Soul. After this the Pen, the Tablets, the Divine Throne, the Divine Court, then Heaven and Hell, the people of the Jinn, the earth and the children of Ādam ﷺ, the final and most perfect creation.

2 — THE CREATION OF ĀDAM عليه السلام

nd when thy Lord said to the angels: 'I am setting in the earth a viceroy.'

"And the angels answered: 'O Lord, will You then create a being to be Your deputy on earth who will shed blood and vomit evil on the face of the earth? We are incessantly engaged in Your praises and we never disobey.' And the Lord said: 'Assuredly I know that you know not.'" [The Cow, 2:30]

When the Lord spoke these words, the angels all grew afraid and they were stricken with awe by the power of these words. They began to circumambulate the Ka'ba seven times on that day, and that is the origin of the rite we perform to this very day.

The Lord intended to create Ādam عليه السلام and He revealed to the earth: "O Earth, I wish to create the Children of Ādam from your clay, and they should live upon you and worship Me, and I shall grant them paradise as their final station, and if they disobey Me, I shall place them in Hell." Then He sent the angel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام to fetch some clay so that He could begin the work of Creation. When Jibrā'īl عليه السلام stretched out his hand to pick up some clay, the earth resisted, invoking the Divine Name: "By the Might and the Glory of my Lord, do not touch me, do not stretch out your hand for me to take any part of my clay!".

Before Jibrā'īl عليه السلام set out to perform this task as he had been ordered by the Lord, Iblīs had gone and warned the earth not to give him any of her earth. Iblīs had long believed that the Lord would make him His deputy on earth, and when he heard that He was planning to call into being a wholly new creature, he was eaten by envy and jealousy. So he tried to subvert the plans of the Lord, advising the earth that what the Lord planned to create from its clay would be no good for it. When the earth refused to yield up any of her clay to him, Jibrā'īl عليه السلام returned to his station and was silent. The Lord addressed him and said:

"O Jibrā'īl, have you brought the clay?" Jibrā'īl ﷺ answered "O Lord, I went and did as Thou bade me do, but the Earth besought me and invoked Thy Holy Name not to take anything from her, and I could not do it by force."

The Lord then sent the Angel Mīkā'īl ﷺ to procure the clay, but the same happened also to him and he did not succeed. Likewise it was with Isrāfīl ﷺ, he too returned without success. Finally the turn came to 'Azrā'īl ﷺ who went to the earth and asked her for the clay, upon the Command of the Almighty. The earth implored him also and besought him with all her might and persuasion, but 'Azrā'īl ﷺ was not moved, and said: "It is the Command of the Almighty, so be quiet!" And in spite of her protests he gathered some earth for this creature to be formed, and the earth screamed all the while the angel took the earth from her. He collected clay from every land, from every continent, from all the four corners of the earth. For this reason, mankind is so varied, and there are so many different races and hues.

Then 'Azrā'īl ﷺ brought the clay before the Lord and the Lord asked, "What did she say when you took the clay from her?" 'Azrā'īl ﷺ replied: "O Lord, she screamed all the while and implored me by Thy Holy Name not to take any of it, but I carried out Thy Command and I listened not to her protests." Then the Lord spoke and said, "O 'Azrā'īl, for this that you have listened single-mindedly to My Command, and never were in doubt as to what was demanded of you, I will charge you with the task of taking their souls when they are to die. At that time they will certainly cry and scream and entreat you to leave them, but you among all the angels will pay no attention to their clamour and heed My Command alone." From that time on, 'Azrā'īl ﷺ has not smiled even once.

Allah Almighty took the lump of clay, and in forty days He made it into a dough-like mass. Then He took from it a piece and mixed it with a part of Hell, and He took another piece and mixed it with Paradise. Then He spoke: "I am Allah, and to Me belongs all judgment, and none judges Me."

He sent Jibrā'īl ﷺ to fetch a bit of earth from the very core of the earth, and he mixed it into the dough. But this piece was

like musk or amber, a very wonderful substance, such as was not found in all the *janna* and its gardens of delights, and nothing like this was ever created. And He placed this within Ādam ﷺ, and all the angels knew that this was the clay that Muḥammad ﷺ was going to be made of.

It is written: "*... and of water fashioned every living thing ...*" [The Prophets, 21:30]. All of creation is essentially made of water, even the clay of the earth and its firmness, and all its creatures. Water is the original substance.

Then Allah Almighty created the *nafs* (the lower, appetitive, commanding soul of man; his ego). When the *nafs* is told, "Go!" it says, "No, I don't want to," and when it is told "Come!" it says, "no, I don't want to." It was asked: "Who are you?" It answered: "Who am I? I am I, and you are you." Then the order was passed for the *nafs* to be punished with the heaviest afflictions for 1,000 years. It was brought back and asked again, "Who are you?" "Who am I?" it said, "I am I, and you are you." And they took it away and made it suffer more and more punishment, for another 1,000 years. They led it back before the Lord who asked it again: "Who are you?" It answered: "Well, who am I?" And He asked it: "And who am I?" The *nafs* said: "Who are you?" And its pride had only increased. So the Lord ordered it to be placed in the Valley of Hunger, and it was tormented by hunger for a thousand years. Then it was brought back before the Lord who asked it: "Who am I, O *nafs*?" Then the *nafs* answered: "You are He beside whom there is no other god." It was chastened by hunger alone, and for this reason the Lord has enjoined on us a whole month of fasting so that our *nafs* might be disciplined through hunger.

Allah Almighty created the souls 40,000 years before He created the children of Ādam ﷺ. And He created our provisions 40,000 years before He even created the souls. As it is written the Holy Qur'ān, "*And in heaven is your provision, and that you are promised.*" [The Scatterers, 51:22].

The angels said: "You have created man and he will shed blood on the face of the earth." The angels were created for no other purpose than to glorify the Lord Almighty, but they

were not created to be Allah's deputy on earth. Because they never ceased praising the Glory of the Lord with all their many thousand faces and tongues, they thought they were better than the sons of Ādam ﷺ. But in ten points they were mistaken, concerning Ādam ﷺ:

They defamed and discredited Ādam ﷺ; they had certain assumptions about him before they had even seen or known Ādam ﷺ; they testified against him falsely before they had seen him; they attributed to him bad character, but Ādam ﷺ was a prophet and he was of the righteous; they passed judgment over one who was absent; they attributed to him nothing but lust and anger; they were envious of Ādam ﷺ; they maintained that Ādam ﷺ was covetous of being Allah's deputy on earth — but how could that be, since he was not yet created?; they were proud of themselves and vain, for their continuous worship and praising of the Lord; they opposed the Will of the Creator.

The Lord said to them: "Verily, I know that which ye do not know," and the angels were terrified. Out of their great fear and reverence for the Lord they began circling the Throne every day for three hours, and they wept and begged the Lord for forgiveness. The Lord pointed to a river which flowed beneath the Divine Throne and which is called the Water of Life. "Wash therein your faces, hands and feet three times each," commanded the Lord, "until you are forgiven." They washed, and the Lord forgave them all.

"*He created man of a clay like the potter's, and He created the Jinn of a smokeless fire. Then which of your Lord's bounties will you deny?*" The Merciful, 55:14–16] When He had thus formed man from clay, He left him to stand in the sun, and the wind and the rain. "*Has there (not) been an endless span of time before man appeared, a time when he was not yet a thing to be thought of?*" [Man, 76:1]

During this period Iblīs came down to look at what the Lord had created, and he struck him with his finger, and a sound like an echo came forth, as when you strike a clay pot. Iblīs thought to himself, "This thing is empty, its insides are hollow!" And he opened its mouth and looked down into it and was confirmed in his view that it was completely empty. Now he was in the

grip of his envy, and he went to the angels and put the question to them: what would they do if the Lord brought this hollow thing He had created to life, and if He gave it a soul and all that was necessary to turn it into a living being — would they obey him, if they were ordered to? The angels answered, "Of course we would obey him, for it is the Will of our Lord." Iblīs said, "No, I will not obey him, I would either destroy him, or I would have to disobey the Lord's Command." And to this he swore an oath by his right hand.

The Lord ordered the soul of man to enter his still lifeless body. He enlightened this soul with spiritual lights, then he ordered it to enter. The soul said. "How shall I enter him, it is a difficult matter!" The Lord said: "You shall enter by force, and you shall emerge by force."

When the Lord had made the soul enter the body of man, all its parts, one by one came alive, his skin, and flesh and bones, everything came to life. The soul entered from the head, and first it reached the brain, and feeling came to the brain and spread from there into all the limbs. Then it reached the eyes.

All his body still resembled the clay he was fashioned of, littl by little only was it turning into sentient flesh. When his soı reached his eyes, Ādam opened them, and the Lord showed him the Divine Throne. He looked upon the Throne and below it he saw two lines of writing: the first line read: *lā ilāha illā llah, Muḥammadu r-rasūlullāh*. And the Lord taught Ādam to read before he could even speak, for the soul had not yet reached his tongue. The second line read: "The servant is sinful and the Lord is forgiving."

"*Recite: and thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen, taught man that he knew not.*" [The Blood-Clot, 96:3–5]

The soul descended until it reached the nose. As it reached the nose, Ādam ﷺ sneezed. By that time the soul had reached the mouth and the tongue, and Ādam ﷺ said, "*Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, praise be to Allah," his first words. The Lord of the Worlds answered: "*Yarḥamuka rabbuka, yā* Ādam," which means, Your Lord has mercy on you, O Ādam. This is the origin of the custom we keep. When somebody has sneezed, it is *sunna* for him

to say *al-ḥamdu li-llāh*. Whoever is with him and hears him say these words, it is *wājib* for him to answer *yarḥamuka llāh*. Then the first person, the sneezer, says *yahdinā wa yahdikumu llāh*, may Allah guide us and you. If a person neglects saying *al-ḥamdu li-llāh* after sneezing, it is not a great mistake, it is an omission of a *sunna* practice, but it is no sin. However, the person who neglects to give the appropriate answer commits a sin, as he is leaving out an action which is *wājib*, the same as in the case of giving *salāms* and returning them. He who does not answer the *salāms* given to him commits a reprehensible act.

From this first *ḥamd* (praise) that Ādam ﷺ spoke after he sneezed, the Lord fashioned the Banner of Praise, *liwā'u l-ḥamd*, beneath which He will unite all the prophets and saints on the Day of Gathering, giving the standard into the hand of our noble Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ to lead us all.

Little by little the soul proceeded into the body until it had reached Ādam's heart. The heart began to beat in remembrance of its Lord. The beating of our heart is a constant repetition of the Divine Name, *Allah, Allah, Allah*, it is always making *dhikr*. Then the soul descended into the belly, and all the way down until it reached the feet. All creatures admired the beauty of Ādam, for no creature of such beauty had yet been created. The beauty of the angels is similar to the beauty of Ādam, but Ādam's beauty is of a special kind, and it increased with every day.

Allah Almighty sent the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ with three things: reason, modesty and faith. He said to the angel, "Let him choose one of these things." Given the choice, Ādam ﷺ chose reason, and told the other two gifts to go away. But modesty and faith said, "Wherever reason goes, we must go as well, we will not be separated." For whoever has modesty, is he not a believer? First there was reason. From reason comes faith and from faith springs modesty. Hence the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said: "Modesty is from Faith." Those who have no shame and no modesty also have no faith. Faith and modesty are always found together. And whoever has faith, he also has reason. So, Faith said, " The Lord has commanded me to stay wherever

reason stays," and Modesty said, "I am to go wherever faith may go." So the three refused to separate and remained with Ādam ﷺ for all time.

The Lord commanded the angels to bring Ādam's clothing from paradise, and they brought him paradise wraps and clothed and adorned him, and stood in wonder gazing at his great beauty.

Whenever Ādam ﷺ opened his mouth to speak or to breathe, a light would shine from his mouth and nose, and this light shone as bright as the sunlight. He asked, "O Lord, what is this light!" He was told, "This is the light of Muḥammad ﷺ." He asked the Lord to let him see this light plainly, and the Lord placed the light upon his brow, between his eyebrows. It shone upon Ādam's forehead as brightly as the sun, or as the light of the moon at its fullest. All was lit by this light, in whatever direction he turned his face.

Then Allah Almighty ordered Ādam ﷺ to preach a sermon to the angels. Now how should he find anything to say to the angels who are engaged in perpetual worship of the Lord for uncounted aeons before Ādam ﷺ was even created? However, it was the Command of the Almighty, and He called all the angels to assemble and hear the sermon, the *khuṭba,* of Ādam ﷺ. All the angels came together, and there were 20,000 rows of angels, each row extending from the West to the East. Ādam ﷺ began his address in a most sweet and beautiful voice, and he ascended a *minbar,* a pulpit, which they had brought for him from the *janna.* This pulpit stood on seven pedestals and was covered in green silk, studded with precious jewels and diamonds. It spread a dazzling light from all these many facetted gems. Ādam ﷺ ascended the *minbar* wearing a four-cornered crown of gold upon his head. Each of these corners cast a different kind of light, and this light reached all the four corners of the earth. Then Ādam ﷺ began to speak.

"*And He taught Ādam the names, all of them,*" [The Cow, 2:31]. The Lord had taught Ādam ﷺ the names of everything in the world. He spoke to the angels, "O My angels, tell me their names," and the angels answered, "*Glory be to Thee! We know not*

save what Thou hast taught us" [The Cow, 2:32]. Then the Lord ordered Ādam ﷺ, "*Ādam, tell them the names,*" [The Cow, 2:33]. Ādam ﷺ then spoke and told them the names of all things in existence, as the Lord had taught him. Then he saluted the angels, saying, "*As-salāmu 'alaykum*, oh angels of the Lord," and they returned his *salām* full of respect and reverence. And Ādam ﷺ asked the Lord, "O Lord, have You created any creature more excellent than me?" And the Lord answered: "By My Majesty and Divine Power, I have created no creature more preferable and favoured than yourself, O Ādam."

Allah Almighty commanded the angels to place Ādam ﷺ on a throne of light and to show him all the heavens. They did so, and it took one thousand years. After 1000 years the Lord bade the angels make obeisance to Ādam, and they all fell down before him in prostration except for Iblīs, out of pride he refused to bow low. The first of the angels to fall down before Ādam ﷺ was Isrāfil ﷺ, for he could perceive the whole of the Qur'ān written upon the forehead of Ādam ﷺ. He is a very great and highly honoured angel, and he is one of the messengers among the angels. But Iblīs and some of those with him did not bow before Ādam ﷺ, and the Lord sent a fire to destroy them. After their destruction, Iblīs was rejected and cursed.

Allah sent to Ādam ﷺ his sustenance and the first food Ādam ate was a bunch of white grapes. When he had eaten, he pronounced the words, *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, praise be to Allah. Thence it has become the custom to give thanks to the Lord who has created us and provided for us after taking anything of food or drink, and to remember the Lord's favours on us.

"*If you are thankful, surely I will increase you*" [Ibrāhīm, 14:7].

The more thankful we are, the more the Lord will bestow upon us from His endless stores of bounty. This will be the *sunna* until the Day of Judgement.

After the creation of Ādam ﷺ the angels showed him their heavens and the regions around the Throne for one-hundred years; the Lord created for him a winged horse of musk, whose wings were made of coral and pearls. The angels mounted Ādam ﷺ upon the horse, Isrāfil ﷺ walking on his left, Mīkā'īl

ﷺ on his right, and Jibrā'īl ﷺ leading his horse by the bridle. Thus they encircled all the heavens and the earth until a thousand years had passed. Then Ādam ﷺ took up his dwelling in the *janna,* the paradise gardens.

After the creation of Ādam ﷺ, some of his clay was left over, and from it the Lord formed the date-palm. For this reason the Holy Prophet said to his companions: "Give honour to your father's sister!" And they asked him: "Who is this aunt?" and he answered, "The date-palm."

Ādam ﷺ lived in the *janna* for a long time, surrounded by all the delights of paradise, and yet he could not fully enjoy them, for he was alone. Even paradise without company fails to please. He was shown all that could be imagined of beautiful tastes and sights, and he was asked, "Ādam, are you content?" "No," he would say, "show me something else, it is not what I desire." At last, the Lord sent upon him a deep sleep. Now, up until that time. Ādam ﷺ had never known sleep — and in his sleep, the Lord took from him a rib and from it created Ḥawwā'. But Ādam did not feel this. Because Ḥawwā' was created from a crooked rib, it is said that women must be treated gently and with consideration, yet with firmness. For if you allow their crooked nature to go on unchecked, it will become more and more crooked, and if you try to bend them straight, they will break.

Allah Almighty created Ḥawwā' and invested her with great beauty. She came into being as a young woman, dressed and adorned as a bride, with a crown upon her head. And they sat her beside Ādam's head.

When Ādam ﷺ awoke, the angels wished to test him to see if he really knew the names of all things. For Ādam ﷺ had been asleep during the creation of Ḥawwā', so how could he possess any knowledge of her? So they asked him, "Who is this?" Ādam ﷺ answered, "Why, she is my wife, the Almighty Lord has created her for me." "What is her name?" "Her name is Ḥawwā'." The Lord had shown him all this in his dreams.

Ādam ﷺ wanted to touch her and reached out for her, but a call sounded from on high, stopping him. "It is forbidden," he

was told, "first the marriage contract must be written. And then you must give her the bridal price, the dower." "What sort of dower must I give her, see all these gardens of paradise, they all will belong to her!" "No, that will not do; you must salute the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ ten times in one breath! That will be her price!" Ādam ﷺ took a deep breath, and gave five *ṣalawāt* on one breath, then he had to draw another breath. And he completed the five remaining *ṣalawāt* with the second breath. The Lord accepted it, and from this is derived the custom of paying the dower for the daughters of Ḥawwā' in two parts, one part before the marriage ceremony, and the other part at a later date. It is permissible.

"*It is He who created you out of one living soul, and made of him his spouse that he might rest in her.*" [The Battlements, 7:189]

3 – ĀDAM'S FALL FROM PARADISE

TOGETHER THEY LIVED in the *janna* and they were extremely happy and contented. The Lord said to them: "O Ādam and Ḥawwā', eat and drink of whatever pleases you in this paradise home, but do not approach this one tree. My Peace and Mercy may be upon you." And the Lord regarded His creation and He saw that it was good, that it was perfect, and He praised His own work and all the angels fell in with Him and sang His praises, so that the heavens resounded.

The Lord said to Ādam, "I have created you in the best of all possible forms, and I have made you to walk upright on two legs, I have blown upon you the Breath of Life. I have set you above the angels and made them bow down before you, and him who did not bow I have cursed for your sake. Then I have made for you your companion and mate, Ḥawwā', and for you both I have prepared the *janna* 2000 years before you were created. Now I ask of you only that you do not go near that tree, which I have forbidden you. If you disobey and eat the fruit of that tree, I shall expel you from paradise and punish you with the fire." Ādam said: "O Lord, I have heard and I will obey."

The devil heard these words as they were spoken, and he began to devise his plan for Ādam's fall from paradise. He came up close to the gates of paradise (from which he was excluded), stood there and wept. As he stood there weeping, the peacock noticed him and came to the gate and asked him why he was so sad. The devil answered from outside the gate, "Oh, you do not know what I know, you do not know that there is death, and what a dreadful thing that is, how it makes you look and feel, and you too will taste of it." And he proceeded to describe to the peacock death in all its horrible details. Listening to him the peacock also began to weep. Eventually it encountered the snake. The snake then was different from its present form, it was a beautiful creature that walked on two high legs, as a camel, and had a pair of lovely, graceful wings. The snake met the weeping peacock and asked to know the reason for its distress. The peacock told him all that devil had told him about death and its horror and how much this had affected him. He had also said to him, that everybody must die, even the inhabitants of the *janna*, but that there was one remedy against death, they must eat of the fruit of a certain tree, and from that they could gain immortality and remain in paradise forever and ever. So the snake went up to the gate where the devil stood weeping. "Show us this tree," he said to the devil, "so that we might eat from it and become immortal." Even in those far-off days at the beginning of time nobody desired to die.

The devil said, "Let me into the garden, then I will show you that tree." The snake and the peacock answered, "How should we let you into the garden, we know that the Lord has banned you from entering into it, and Riḍwān, the angel guardian of paradise, is watchful, he will see us; it is forbidden to let you in." The devil then said to the snake: "Open your mouth, I will enter into you, and when you close your mouth, no one will know that I am there. No one but Allah Almighty knows what is hidden, not Riḍwān, nor any of the other angels can know unless the Almighty informs them." The snake opened up its mouth wide, and the devil made himself very small and crept inside. In this way he led the snake to the forbidden tree. It

was the wheat tree. Ḥawwā' saw the snake coming, and it was crying. She asked it why it was crying, since there are no tears and no unhappiness in paradise, it is the abode of eternal, everlasting felicity. The snake said to her, "O Ḥawwā', do you not know that there is an end even to your state of bliss, you and your husband Ādam will die in the end and you will be driven from here, and all will be changed — your beautiful bodies will decay and all will fall to pieces," and he described to her everything the devil inspired him to tell her. He concluded his description by telling Ḥawwā' that if she ate from the tree they were standing under, she would become immortal, and all this horror would not befall her.

Ḥawwā' was frightened and easily convinced, so she ate from the tree. Then she picked some fruit and brought it to her husband Ādam and said to him, "O Ādam, a messenger has come to me who has told me of death, and he says that we must eat from this tree if we do not want to die. See here, I have brought you some of its fruit." Now all of Ādam's children were contained within his loins at that time, all the unbelievers and transgressors of the law and wrong-doers among the human race were contained within him, and they spoke up and clamoured at that moment, and made Ādam forget his promise to the Lord. As Ḥawwā' kept urging him to eat one of the grains, he gave in at last, took one of them into his mouth and was about to swallow it, when the angel Jibrā'īl appeared to him, and strangled him lightly. Therefore, from that time until this very day, all men have in their throats what is called the "Ādam's apple". The grain of wheat did not descend all the way into his belly.' however, swallowed the forbidden fruit, and as a result she and all of her daughters are now afflicted by monthly courses and after-birth bleeding. That will be their punishment until the end of time.

When they had eaten the fruit, all their crowns and paradise clothing suddenly took off and flew from them, and Ādam found himself standing naked and uncovered. He began to jump about in the attempt to find cover for himself, but each time he tried to hide behind some trees, these trees lifted up

their branches and exposed him; no tree was willing to hide his shame. Then he heard the voice of the Lord calling to him, "O Ādam, what is it with you, why are you jumping about in such a strange way?" "O Lord," he replied, "I am ashamed of You, because I have forgotten the promise I made You, I have broken my word and forsaken Your trust."

At last Ādam came upon a grapevine which was very large but had only few leaves. "This tree needs its leaves more than I do," he thought and went on until he came to the pomegranate. "This tree resembles a dainty, delicate lady, its leaves will not serve to cover anything," and he passed it by.

Last of all he came to the fig-tree. The fig-tree let him have three of its leaves, and they were large, so he covered himself with them and hid his shame. Ḥawwā' also came to the tree, and it let her have five of its leaves, for she needed more than Ādam to cover herself. For this reason a man's shroud is made up of three pieces, while a woman's shroud is made of five pieces of cloth.

The Lord then proclaimed to Ādam عليه السلام that he was no longer deserving of paradise, and that henceforth he was cast out. Ādam عليه السلام and all that was in the heavens began to weep at that. Ādam عليه السلام tried to hold on to the trees around him, but they would not allow him to touch them. Everything in paradise wept for Ādam عليه السلام, all except silver and gold. "Why do you two not weep for Ādam?" asked the Lord. They answered, "O Lord, he gave You his word, why did he forget to keep it? He has deserved all that has befallen him, it is his own fault — why should we cry for him!" The Lord said, "Everything weeps and laments for Ādam عليه السلام, all of creation honours and respects him, except the twain of you. For this, the children of Ādam will hold nothing to be of higher esteem in the world than silver and gold, even though you be but rocks."

The Lord then addressed the fig-tree, "O fig-tree, why did you give Ādam عليه السلام your leaves to cover himself with when all the other trees denied him their foliage?" Answered the fig-tree, "O Lord, I have learnt generosity from You — You have given me so many more leaves than I need for myself. So when this

one came to me in his need, why should I not let him partake of the abundance You have bestowed upon me?" The Lord said to the fig-tree, "You too will go down with them to the earth, and your flowers will not open to the outside as do the flowers of every other tree, but to the inside." And there are many other peculiarities to the fig-tree. One *ḥadīth* tells us: "If a person burns a fig-tree, and the smoke of it reaches his house, he is obliged to pull down and destroy that house."

The aloes tree (*'ūd*) cried more than any other tree for Ādam's loss of paradise, and it tried to hide him. Allah said to it, "You, too, will go down to earth with Ādam, and he will cut down your wood and burn it so that he might smell your good smell, and it reminds him of his home in paradise. He will have no mercy on you."

The Lord sent Ādam ﷺ down onto a mountain in India (Sri Lanka), Mt. Serendib. Ḥawwā' came down at Jidda. With them came the fig-tree, and the *'ūd* tree, the devil and the peacock. Formerly in the *janna,* the peacock had an exquisitely beautiful voice, now its voice was changed to a miserable squeak for that it had been the conveyor of the devil's words. Last of all the snake was driven out of paradise, because it had transported Iblīs into the *janna,* and the Lord punished it by taking from it its legs and its wings and making it crawl on its belly. And because it had taken Iblīs into its mouth, its mouth filled with poison, and so it remains to this very day.

Ādam ﷺ sat on Mount Serendib and wept so much that the whole valley was filled with his tears. He cried: "*Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if Thou dost not forgive us, and have mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the lost.*" [The Battlements, 7:23].

He asked for nothing but his Lord's forgiveness, all the splendours of paradise lost were as nothing to him; to attain his Lord's mercy was all that mattered to him. Ḥawwā' sat weeping at the shores of the sea she had landed at, and her tears fell upon the oysters and sea shells and they were turned into pearls. The tears of Ādam ﷺ became fragrant spices like ginger and cloves and galingale, and many other medicinal plants as well. Iblīs, the devil, wept also, from anger and resentment.

From his tears, which fell upon the river waters, the Lord created the crocodiles and alligators and other ugly creatures. The snake wept, and from its tears appeared scorpions and centipedes and other poisonous creatures. From the tears of the peacock — it too wept from annoyance and discontent at having been driven from paradise — came noxious little creatures like fleas, mosquitoes and bed-bugs, which live on the blood of men and animals and cause them much misery.

As long as they had been in paradise, they had never felt the need to evacuate their bowels; now, that they had come to earth, all they ate came out from them as disgusting and filthy matter, so that for forty days they could not pick up the scent of the earth, such was the awful stench that issued from their excrement. And it made them weep even more bitterly.

Ādam ﷺ continued to weep for three hundred years, and his tears filled up the valley. In time the birds came to drink from the pool and they said, "Oh, how delicious is this water, surely there is no better water to be found than this." Ādam understood their speech, and it saddened him all the more, and he cried unto his Lord, "O Lord, even the birds and the beasts make fun of me and ridicule my grief." The Lord answered and called Ādam's name thrice before he responded to His call. "Why do you not answer Me?" asked the Lord. "O my Lord," replied Ādam at length, "I thought You had forgotten Your slave Ādam."

The sin of Ādam ﷺ was not a great sin, it was a comparatively minor sin, in relation to what his progeny were to commit. After three hundred years the Lord inspired Ādam ﷺ to pray, "O Lord, forgive me my sin for the sake of Muḥammad!" The Lord answered, "O Ādam, how do you know the name of Muḥammad, as he is not yet created?" Ādam ﷺ replied, "Lord, the day You created me and made the spirit of life enter into my head, I opened my eyes, and my gaze fell upon the base of the Divine Throne. There I read two lines: *lā ilāha illā llāh, Muḥammadu r-rasūlullāh.* Had there been anyone better than Muḥammad, You would surely have written his name alongside Your own. In this way I knew that Muḥammad is Your

Beloved and the most excellent of Your entire Creation. In the second line I read: "The servant is culpable, and the Lord is forgiving." From pre-eternity You have written this upon Your Throne. O my Lord, I am guilty, so please do forgive me!" And the Lord forgave him. After He had forgiven Ādam ﷺ, He told him to go in search of Ḥawwā'. The Lord had created Ādam ﷺ to be very tall. He began his walk from India (Sri Lanka) to Jidda (Saudi Arabia). Each place his step fell upon became a city or a town, a dwelling place for men. Wherever he sat down to rest, great cities were built later on, and perhaps the greatest cities of all were built where he lay down to sleep.

Before Ādam ﷺ came down to earth, Iblīs had rushed ahead and spread the news of his coming among all the animals and the wild beasts of the earth. He warned them of the coming of one who would be the wildest of them all and their mortal enemy, who would hunt them down and slaughter them, eat their flesh and use their hide and destroy their happy lives in the forests. He told them of all the things that were going to be. The beasts worried and wondered what they should do. Iblīs advised them, "Now he is only by himself, a single man and he has no weapon. If you attack him promptly and tear him to pieces, there will be an end to him and no further troubles." So as soon as Ādam ﷺ had arrived at Mount Serendib, all the animals were assembled and ready to attack him. Ādam ﷺ called upon his Lord and asked for help. The Lord told him, "Place your hand upon the head of the first animal that comes rushing up to you." The first animal to come up was the dog. Ādam ﷺ placed his hand upon his head and he was tamed and began to work for Ādam ﷺ from that time onward. He defended Ādam ﷺ and drove all the other animals away, by the Grace of the Lord Almighty. The dog is so obedient to man that it surrenders even its own prey to his master when it has been hunting.

Ḥawwā' at Jidda was also on the look-out for Ādam ﷺ, but she did not go very far afield. She ran to and fro between the mountain and the seashore, and wept all the while. At long last she encountered Ādam at Arafat. When they met, Ādam ﷺ

asked her, "O Ḥawwā', I have been searching for you across the whole wide world — where have you been to look for me?" Ḥawwā' acted coy and a little shy, and she answered him, "I did not go anywhere in search of you, I just sat here and waited for you to come and find me." Ādam عليه السلام was a little annoyed at her words and said, "O Ḥawwā', for that you did not run to look for me as I was seeking after you, the place that you sit on shall be cold from now on, and for all times to be." For this reason, the buttocks of all the daughters of Ḥawwā' are always much colder than the rest of their bodies ... [from SHAYKH 'ABDULLĀH AD-DAGHISTĀNĪ ق].

4 — THE REPENTANCE OF ĀDAM عليه السلام

THE LORD OF THE WORLDS wished to forgive Ādam عليه السلام, so He sent Jibrā'īl to Ādam and He said to him, "O Jibrā'īl, Ādam is the Crown of My Creation, a marvel of nature, I have created him from haste; he fears Me more than any other creature, he is the first to sin and the first to repent. Ādam was the first to know My Holy Name and the first to praise Me, him I created to be My deputy on earth, and I placed him in paradise in the beginning, before any deeds were done. He was the first before whom all My angels fell down in prostration, and I have cursed Iblīs because of him. He is the first in gratitude to Me, and the first to repent unto Me, and I have forgiven him, O Jibrā'īl, as I have forgiven all his sons who repent after they have sinned and return to Me."

Jibrā'īl عليه السلام then came to Ādam عليه السلام and said to him, *In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful. "Thereafter Ādam received certain words from his Lord, and he turned towards Him truly He turns, and is All-Compassionate."* [The Cow, 2:37]

'ABDULLĀH IBN 'ABBĀS رضي الله عنهما has related that Ādam said to his Lord, "O Lord, You have created me with the power of Your Hand, and have breathed into me of Your Spirit, and You have made Paradise a dwelling place for me, and You have forgiven me." The Lord spoke, "O Ādam, whatever you ask of

Me, I will give it to you." Ādam said, "O my Lord, if any of my descendants sin against Thee, what wilt Thou do to them?"

The Lord answered: "If they sin, then repent, thereafter, sin and repent again, I will forgive them, unless it be the sin of *shirk,* attributing partners to Me; if they have committed *shirk,* they must renew the attestation of their faith before they attain forgiveness."

After Ādam عليه السلام had completed his prayer, Jibrā'īl عليه السلام came and said, "O Ādam, the Lord forgives you and turns to you." Then the angel struck the ground with his wing, and from it sprang forth a spring, smelling sweeter than musk. He ordered Ādam to wash himself therein, for on account of his having sinned against the Lord his whole body had become black. Ādam عليه السلام bathed in the spring and turned immaculate and white as before. Ādam thanked the Lord and said: "O Lord, You have cleansed me of sin and given back to me my original appearance ..." Then Jibrā'īl عليه السلام brought a wrap from paradise and clothed him.

Jibrā'īl عليه السلام spoke to Mīkā'īl عليه السلام, "O my brother Mīkhā'īl, the Lord has forgiven Ādam." And Mīkhā'īl عليه السلام was glad and said, "If He has forgiven Ādam, He has also forgiven Ḥawwā'," for Ādam leads and Ḥawwā' follows. Ḥawwā' also repented and was forgiven, and Jibrā'īl عليه السلام brought clothes from paradise for her as well.

Ḥawwā' was at Jidda and she was so lonely and heart-sore for Ādam that she cried all the while. Her tears fell upon the ocean, and they turned into pearls and corals. Ādam, on Mt. Serendib was also weeping, but he wept because of his disobedience to the Lord and his separation from paradise. From his tears sprang ginger, galingale and cloves. Allah Almighty has created all the fragrant, aromatic spices from Ādam's tears.

Then the Lord took from paradise one red ruby stone and placed it where now the Ka'ba stands at Mecca. It was also shaped like the Ka'ba. There were in it two doors of emeralds, one to the East and one to the West, and inside it there where many lamps from the lights of paradise. The Lord ordered all men to circumambulate this house, as the heavenly angels circumambulate His Throne. Ādam عليه السلام set out to perform this cir-

cumambulation. But before he began, the angels brought the stone which is now known as the black stone, *ḥajar-i aswad*, only then, it was radiant and white and rays of light proceeded from it, as bright as the sun's rays or the rays of the moon. Every place reached by these rays falls within the *mīqāt* of the *ḥaram*, the boundaries within which pilgrims are required to don *iḥrām*, the special garb of pilgrimage. Later this white stone turned black, on account of the sins of mankind, as it is found today in the building of the Ka'ba.

This house was called the *baytu l-ma'mūr*, and it remained on earth until the time of the flood of Nūḥ ﷺ. When the flood was decreed, the Lord had the angels raise the *baytu l-ma'mūr* up to the fourth heaven, or perhaps it was the seventh heaven, because on the night of the *mi'rāj* the Holy Prophet ﷺ beheld the angels circumambulating it in that heaven.

Then the Lord said to Ādam, "You must respect your wife Ḥawwā' highly, for she is the mother of your children and your companion for life." So the Lord already counseled our father, Ādam on his relations with women. Ādam thanked the Lord and fell down before Him, for he was desirous of meeting Ḥawwā'. When he arrived at the Ka'ba, Ḥawwā' had also come from Jidda to the Ka'ba, but it was said to them, "O Ādam, you must stand on Ṣafā, and she will stand on Marwa, and until you have completed the rites of Ḥajj you may not join together." At 'Arafat then they met and recognized each other, hence the place is called 'Arafat, meaning knowing, recognition. Together they went to Mina where Ādam ﷺ was very happy and delighted to have found his mate, hence this place is called Mina, which means wish, desire, and the Lord's Mercy and Forgiveness came down at Mina when He granted him satisfaction of his desire.

After they had completed their Ḥajj, Ādam ﷺ took his wife back with him to India. Every year they returned once to the Ka'ba and performed Ḥajj, for 40 years. Each of Ādam's steps measured a distance of three days' journey. Every place that Ādam's step fell upon became a center of habitation, and cities were built there by later men.

When Ādam was expelled from paradise, the Lord touched his back with His Divine Power, and from his back, his spine, sprung tiny little seeds. Among them were some that resembled little white pearls, and he held them in his right hand; there were others which were like little black droplets, and these he held in his left hand. The Lord spoke, "O Ādam, these are your children, the companions of the Right, and the companions of the Left. The former I will bring into paradise from My Mercy, the latter will go to Hell, from My Justice." Ādam عليه السلام looked at all those little seeds in his right and he saw that they all bore the likeness of human beings, but there was one among them which caught his attention for it was more radiant than the rest. He asked of his Lord, "Which of my children will this one be?" The Lord answered, "This will be Dā'ūd عليه السلام." Ādam عليه السلام asked, "How long will he live on earth?" "60 years," answered the Lord. "O my Lord," entreated Ādam, "prolong his life just a little!" Said the Lord, "O Ādam, this is a matter already written and decreed. But if you will give him a bit from your own life's span, I will give these years to him." Said Ādam, "All right, I will give him 40 years of my life." And he gave it and the angels bore witness. After that, Ādam عليه السلام looked to the right and he laughed; he looked to the left and he wept.

Once when 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was on Ḥajj, he came to stand before the black stone of the Ka'ba and he spoke to it: "O *ḥajar-i aswad*, you are but a stone. You do no good and no harm, but the Holy Prophet gave you great honour, so I will honour you too." Said 'Alī كرم الله وجهه coming up to him, "O 'Umar, why do speak thus? The Lord of the Worlds has informed us that the Black Stone was an angel before this time, and yet has consciousness. On the Day of Judgement he will testify: he witnesses all the pilgrims who step before him during the Ḥajj, and their names are written by him in a book. In it he records and reports on the Day of Judgement what were their names, for the *ḥajar-i aswad* also has a mouth with which he then will speak."

"When the Lord placed Ādam عليه السلام in paradise, He brought him before the forbidden tree, and He told that angel to re-

main there with him, so he would not forget the Lord's command. When Iblīs, cursed be he, came to Ḥawwā' and seduced her into eating from the forbidden tree and to giving Ādam to eat from it, that angel tried in vain to prevent it. He knew that Ādam ﷺ had broken his covenant with his Lord, and that he had disobeyed. So the Lord took from them their paradise clothing and expelled them from paradise. He then turned that angel into a ruby, and this ruby is the *ḥajar-i aswad.* So this," said 'Alī to 'Umar, "is the origin of the stone you were addressing. Do not say it is without power to help or to harm. If it is written for one, he must fulfill his tryst and come to the Ḥajj, and the stone records his name."

When the Lord showed to Ādam ﷺ all his progeny, the angels were amazed at the great number, and they asked the Lord, "How will they all find place in the world, what will they live on, where will they find room to stand?" The Lord answered them, "O my angels, they will be grouped into four divisions: one group will be in the loins of their fathers, the others in the wombs of their mothers; one group will live on the earth, the other below the earth, in the life of the grave. Thus, when one group goes out, another comes in, and they will not find their conditions too crowded."

5 — ĀDAMS LIFE ON EARTH

THE LORD OF THE WORLDS ordered Ādam ﷺ to build the Ka'ba. "If you do not erect the Holy House, your children will never do it." So Ādam ﷺ built the Ka'ba and began to circumambulate it. Then Ḥawwā' and he settled down into this life on earth. Jibrā'īl ﷺ brought them two oxen from paradise, and iron plow, as well as a tiny part of fire from hell. This hellfire was washed seventy times in the streams of paradise and seven times in the waters of the sea, and with this fire they then burned and cleared a certain area, so that it could be cultivated and their food could be cooked. The fire was then taken back to hell, it did not remain on earth. Jibrā'īl ﷺ also brought Ādam

ﷺ some grains of wheat so he could sow, and Ādam set out to do so. Then Ḥawwā' said, "Give me some seeds too." And by the Grace of the Almighty wheat grew from Ādam's sowing, and barley grew from Ḥawwā's. When the grain was harvested, Ādam wanted to thresh his wheat, but the oxen refused to move, they sat and slept. Ādam ﷺ was at a loss of what to do, so Jibrā'īl ﷺ brought him a stick from the trees of paradise. "Hit them," he told Ādam. Ādam ﷺ set to beating the oxen, and they woke up and said, "Why do you beat us?" "Because you do not follow my command, and you do not move as I wish you to." They looked Ādam ﷺ in the face and said, "Ah, so it is, whoever disobeys, he must taste of punishment." Then Ādam ﷺ cried, "These beasts have come to reproach me, O Lord, for it is I, not these animals, who was disobedient and who must taste of the punishment." And he ceased beating them and wept for a hundred years on account of their words.

After that time Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to him and said: "Do justice unto them, O Ādam." "How shall that justice be done?" asked Ādam ﷺ. "You must work together with them," the angel said, "then you will have your provision and they too will be provided for." So Ādam ﷺ worked together with the oxen, and plowed and sowed, harvested the grain and threshed it. Then they piled the grain onto one side and the straw on another pile. And the pile of grain was very small compared to the enormous pile of straw. Ādam ﷺ brought the oxen to the site and let them choose which pile they would have as their provision. The oxen said, "Of course we want the large pile." And so it was, by the Grace of God, for had they asked for the wheat, only the straw would have remained for the sons of Ādam ﷺ.

Thereupon the Lord spoke to the oxen, "Plow and cease speaking." And from that day on the oxen stopped speaking, and none of the animals spoke after that. The stick which came down to Ādam ﷺ from the heavens was the same stick which later became the staff of Mūsā ﷺ with which he performed so many miracles. Ādam ﷺ had with him a ring when he left paradise, this ring eventually came to Sulaymān ﷺ and became the means of his miraculous powers.

Then Ādam ﷺ and Ḥawwā' took to cooking and baking their bread. They took heated stones and baked their bread on these. Three loaves were thus baked. Ādam ﷺ was very hungry and ate two of the loaves. Ḥawwā' ate half of the remaining loaf and hid the other half. If Ḥawwā' hadn't hidden that half-loaf, nobody in the world would now store up things and hoard belongings: people desire more than they need and keep it stashed away for years and years, for their children and their children's children; this they have learnt from our mother Ḥawwā'.

After having eaten, they felt for the first time the call of nature, the need to empty their bowels came over them. While they were in paradise, they had never known this feeling after having eaten their paradise dinners. So Jibrā'īl ﷺ came and opened a hole for them to perform their need. They then perceived a horrible stench arising from their excretions, and they felt very bad about that. Ādam ﷺ wept and wept, and said, "O Lord, this is the result of my sin that whatever I may eat of the best and purest food will turn into the vilest of all smells. This then is the way of the world, in paradise there are no toilets."

Ādam ﷺ asked his Lord, "O Lord, to which day do You give greatest preference?" The Lord answered, "My preferred day is Friday (*yawmu l-jumu'a*)." And Ādam ﷺ asked, "Which words are most pleasing to You?" The Lord answered, "The words *lā ilāha illā llāh* are the words most pleasing to Me. Whoever pronounces these words, him I will save from hell and bring him into paradise." "And which of the months do You love the most?" "It is the month of Ramadan in which men are fasting and repenting, and I forgive them and look upon them with the Gaze of Mercy."

While Ḥawwā' was living in paradise, she never had any monthly courses. After they came to earth, however, these afflictions, including discharge after childbirth, beset her. One day while she was praying, her period began, and she said to Ādam ﷺ, "What shall I do? Shall I continue my prayer or not?" Ādam ﷺ said, "I also do not know, let us ask." So he inquired of Jibrā'īl ﷺ and Jibrā'īl ﷺ also did not know and said, "We must ask the Lord." The Lord said that she must leave off her prayer

until she was clean again. So Ḥawwā' began to observe this rule and left her prayers until she was clean. Then it was Ramadan and they were fasting, for there was always a month of fasting from the very beginning, from the time of our father Ādam ﷺ until our own days, and Ḥawwā' asked, "What shall I do, may I fast during my monthly flow?" "Leave it," she was told, "for fasting too is an act of worship, as is prayer; you may break your fast." After the month of Ramadan was over, she was ordered to make up the days of fasting that she had missed. She said: "O Lord, why is this: praying is worship as is fasting, and I do not have to make up my prayers?" The Lord answered: "It was My order for you not to pray, but for you not to fast, that was at your own prompting." But prayer would have been a lot to make up, and fasting only a little, a small part of the month, not even a week; for this reason the Lord enjoined her to make up her fasting and not her prayer. The prayers a woman misses during the period of her ritual impurity are made up by a special contingent of angels, so that she loses out on nothing.

There is a *ḥadīth* from the Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ who says to 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها, "If a woman takes a bath after her monthly courses have ended, and she prays two *rak'ats*, reading first *al-Fātiḥa*, then three times the sura *Qul yā ayyuhā l-kāfirūn* in the first *rak'a*, and in the second *rak'a* after *al-Fātiḥa* three times *Qul huwa llāhu aḥad*, the Lord forgives her, her sins of forty days and gives her the rewards of a martyr." This is another mercy from our Lord.

When Ādam ﷺ was in paradise, the Lord ordered Jibrā'īl ﷺ to take Ādam ﷺ on a tour through all the gardens of Paradise. They toured the *janna*, and Ādam ﷺ espied a great castle whose walls were made of gold and silver, of topaz and ruby and most precious materials. Inside this castle was a throne of light underneath a dome of light. Upon the throne sat a person of amazingly beautiful aspect who made Ādam ﷺ forget all the beauty of Ḥawwā' in an instant. There was a crown of light set upon her head, she was adorned with pearls and a girdle of light. Ādam ﷺ gazed at her intensely and he asked, "O Lord, who is this person?" The Lord answered him, "This is the

shape of Fāṭima, and the crown upon her head is Muḥammad; the jewels in her hand are Ḥasan and Ḥusayn; the girdle of light around her waist, that is 'Alī."

There were also five gates to the palace of light and an inscription above each of these. Above the first was written: "I am the Praiseworthy (*al-ḥamīd*) and this is Muḥammad." Above the second: "I am the highest of the high (*al-'alī, al-muta'ālī*) and this is 'Alī." Above the third: "I am the Creator (*al-fāṭir*) and this is Fatima." On the fourth: "I am the beneficent (*al-muḥsin*) and this is Ḥasan." And above the fifth gate: "I am the bestower of charity (*dhu l-iḥsān*) and this is Ḥusayn." Jibrā'īl ﷺ then said to Ādam ﷺ, "Mark well these names, O Ādam, there will come a day when you will have need of them."

Now, when Ādam descended upon the earth he wept for three-hundred years. Then he heard a voice, calling to him, saying, "Ādam, look upon the *baytu l-ma'mūr* up in the heavens." Ādam directed his gaze upwards, then he prostrated himself and said, "O Praiseworthy One, for the sake of Muḥammad, O Highest of the High, for the sake of 'Alī, O Creator, for the sake of Fāṭima az-Zahrā', O Beneficent One, for the sake of Ḥasan, O Bestower of Charity, for the sake of Ḥusayn, forgive me, O my Lord, and accept my repentance."

The Lord then spoke: "O Ādam, had you asked forgiveness by these names for every single one of your descendants from now until the Day of Judgement, I would have forgiven them all and placed not one of them in hell."

When Ādam ﷺ was driven from paradise, he cried, "O Lord, You have created me from Your Almighty Power, You had given me dwelling in Paradise and made the angels to bow low before me, and I have disobeyed You by following the command of my lower soul. I beseech Your forgiveness and return unto You, will You not accept my repentance?" The Lord of the worlds spoke and said, "O Ādam, before I created the Heavens and the Earth, I had already written: '*Lord of the heavens and the earth, and of what between them is, the All-Mighty, the All-Forgiving*' [Ṣād, 38:66]. My Divine Name, *al-ghaffār*, the All-Forgiving, is not wiped out by the sins you have committed. I forgive you,

and I give you of My Power and My Mercy and I will bring you back to paradise at the end of time."

Also, when Ādam ﷺ came down to earth, his whole body was black, all except for his fingernails which had remained white. The angels began to weep, saying, "O Lord, You have created this beautiful creature from Your Perfection and Your Power, and you have given him paradise garden for his abode, and You have ordered all the angels to bow low before him. Now for only one sin You have repulsed him and driven him from paradise and separated him from his wife Ḥawwā'. He was beautiful and radiantly white, now You have made him to be black and his light is dimmed, we weep for him."

So the Lord said, "Let him fast for three days." Ādam ﷺ fasted for three days, on the thirteenth, the fourteenth and the fifteenth of the lunar month, and gradually he became all white again. For this reason these days are called the "White days," and they are the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth of every lunar month. If a person fasts on these three days, the Lord forgives him all his sins and removes from him his spiritual blemishes.

Ādam ﷺ looked to the Divine Throne and he saw written upon it the name of Muḥammad Muṣṭafā. Seeing this name he became desirous of meeting this person, so great was the love inspired by his name. The Lord of the Worlds said to him, "O Ādam, this person is from among your descendants, you cannot now behold him, I will bring him forth in the last times. But I will let you see his light." And the Lord placed the light of Muḥammad Muṣṭafā upon Ādam's brow so that wherever he walked, everything shone from this light. But he could not himself see it for it was sparkling upon his own forehead. So Ādam ﷺ spoke, "O Lord, do let me see this light!" Then the words of the *shahāda* descended upon his forefinger, and he beheld the light. As he saw it, he raised up his finger and pronounced the words of the *shahāda: ashhadu an lā ilāha illā llāh wa ashhadu anna Muḥammadan rasūlullāh.* For this reason the forefinger is also called the shahada finger, and it is why we raise up our finger when reciting the *shahāda.*

One day Jibrā'īl ﷺ brought Ādam ﷺ a ring and said to him, "Wear this on one of your fingers." Ādam ﷺ wished to wear it upon his *shahāda* (index) finger, but Jibrā'īl ﷺ corrected him, saying, "The Lord wishes you to wear it on your little finger, for your forefinger is already highly honoured by the light of Muḥammad, while the little finger is small and weak, and not good for very much, but the Lord loves the small and the weak. So you, too, must have compassion with the weak and the small." Ādam ﷺ then wore the ring on his little finger.

SAYYIDUNĀ 'ALĪ رضي الله عنه reports: "When Ādam ﷺ had eaten from the forbidden tree in paradise, he spit out what he had eaten, and it fell on the ground. From this grew the tree of poison, and the snake ate of it, and its mouth became poisonous, and so it will remain until the Day of Resurrection."

When Ādam came down from heaven to the earth, his feet touched the ground while his head was still in heaven. He was so tall that he heard the praises of the angels, and he wept. He wept so bitterly that the angels felt constricted and said, "O Lord, Ādam's weeping is bothersome to us." The Lord then shortened Ādam's height so that he was henceforth only sixty ells in height.

Ādam ﷺ brought with him four things from paradise: his staff, the fig leaves, his ring and his weeping. The staff was passed on to Mūsā ﷺ who performed innumerable marvels with it. The fig leaves were eaten by the musk deer, and from a gland in its insides comes the wonderful perfumed substance which we call musk. The ring later became the ring of Sulaymān ﷺ, and Allah Almighty invested him with might and power and sovereignty over men and Jinn, birds and beasts and all of creation by the miracle power of this ring.

The fourth thing which Ādam ﷺ brought from Paradise is weeping. There was no weeping in paradise, it is the legacy of Ādam's disobedience. Ādam ﷺ wept after he had sinned and attained the Lord's forgiveness, and the Lord said, "Whenever a disobedient sinner repents of his sins and weeps, promising not to sin again, I say to My angels: 'O My angels, witness ye this sinner weeping on account of his sins and imploring My

forgiveness, as his mother Ḥawwā' also wept, and I turned her tears into pearls and corals which are highly prized among men. Now that her child is weeping, how shall I remunerate him, O angels?' They said, 'Forgive him his sins, O Lord!' 'Not enough,' I say, 'give him more!' 'Let him attain to Your Mercy!' 'Not enough! Increase his reward!' 'O Lord,' they say, 'give him safety from hell!' 'More!' 'Bring him into paradise and grant him eternal felicity!' 'Not enough', I say, 'give him more!' They say: 'O Lord, we do not know how to reward him for his repentance, we do not know what You will give him.' Then I shall say, 'I have forgiven him his sins, the number of tears that fall from his eyes I will equal with My forgiveness. And if one person in a group sheds tears for My sake, I will forgive the whole assembly.'"

6 – QĀBĪL AND HĀBĪL

THERE IS A NARRATION according to which Ḥawwā' gave birth to 120 children, other sources give the number at 80. Each time she gave birth, she bore twins, a girl and a boy. The first twins were Qābīl (Cain) and his sister Ikhlima. The next pair was Hābīl (Abel) and his sister Qābila. Qābīl and Hābīl could marry none other than each other's twin sisters, for there were as yet no other people living. For this one time only the Divine Command was given that these sisters should not be counted as sisters but rather as cousins, for the sake of Ādam's progeny. It was revealed to Ādam ﷺ that Hābīl should marry Qābīl's sister, and Qābīl should marry Hābīl's. Ādam informed his sons of this, but Qābīl was not pleased, because his own sister was the more beautiful one. "What," he said, "shall I take the plain one while he takes my own beautiful sister? No, I do not agree." Ādam ﷺ said, "This is the Divine Command, I can do nothing more in this matter." But Qābīl was stubborn and headstrong and persisted in his disagreement.

Hābīl was a shepherd and kept flocks of sheep. Qābīl was a farmer and tilled the soil. The Lord then commanded them

each to bring a sacrifice. At that time, the sign that a sacrifice had been accepted by the Lord was that fire descended from heaven onto the altar on which the sacrifice lay and devoured it. Today when we sacrifice, we divide the meat and eat part of it ourselves and distribute another part. Formerly it was not so. The offering that had not been accepted was left behind on the altar.

Now Hābīl was of good character and of a pious nature. Qābīl was headstrong and rebellious. Hābīl received the Lord's Command humbly, went and fetched the best ram he had in his flock and sacrificed it, saying, "Whether the Lord accepts my sacrifice or not, I am content with the outcome." Qābīl, however, brought some sheaves of wheat of no great worth and said, "This will do, this is more than good enough." And they both placed their sacrifices on the altar. The Divine Fire then descended and accepted Hābīl's sacrifice. Qābīl's offering remained, untouched and rejected.

Thereupon Qābīl said to Hābīl, "I want to kill you." Hābīl answered, "Even so, the Lord accepts only the offering of the God-fearing. If you raise your hand against me, O my brother, yet I will not rise against you," for Hābīl was strong and vigorous, while Qābīl was slight and weakly. Hābīl was well able to defend himself, but he feared the Lord.

These events took place in the area around Damascus, for this was where Ādam عليه السلام had settled with his sons. Ādam and Ḥawwā' had gone to the Ḥajj, and Qābīl stayed behind with the intention of killing his brother. But up to that time, nobody had died on earth, death was not yet known, nor how to put a man to death, or what to do with his body. But Qābīl firmly intended to rid himself of his brother. Hābīl went out to herd his sheep on the mountain of Qāsiyūn above Damascus, and he laid his head on a stone thinking no evil and went to sleep. Qābīl followed him, walking behind and thinking to himself, "Now how can I kill him?" Then Shayṭān came to Qābīl to teach him how to do this evil, Shayṭān is never far away when it comes to that, and he assumed a human form. He came before Qābīl and in his hand held a slingshot. Picking up some stones,

he flung them at the birds in the air until they fell bleeding from the skies. "Aha" thought Qābīl, "that is how it's done," and he went to the place where his brother was sleeping. He picked up a big boulder and hit Hābīl on the head with it until he died.

When Hābīl was dead, Qābīl stood over him and knew not what to do with his body. He picked it up and carried him around on his back for forty days. He roamed through mountains and valleys, crossed deserts and plains, but he could not figure out what to do with his brother's body. From this and from his remorse he became thin and weak, and his face lost all its light. At last the Lord had mercy on him in his miserable condition. One day when he had laid down the corpse to rest, confused and full of regret, the Lord showed him two crows. One of these crows killed the other by pecking on its head, then it began scraping and digging in the earth until it had created a hollow big enough to lay the body in. Qābīl was watching the crow, and finally he understood. He dug a grave for his brother and laid him to rest in it. Then he went to marry Hābīl's sister.He arrived back at his home just as Ādam عليه السلام and Ḥawwā' were returning from their Ḥajj in Mecca. They saw him coming and noticed that he was changed. They asked, "Where is your brother, Qābīl?" to which he replied: "I don't know, am I my brother's keeper?" Still he was stubborn and full of rebellion. "Why is your face so changed?" asked his father Ādam عليه السلام. "From the sun and the wind, I suppose," he said. Then Ādam عليه السلام went up to the Jabal Arba'īn (on Mount Qāsiyūn) to the blessed cave which can be seen there till this day, to look for his son Hābīl. He came to the place called the *maghārat ad-dam,* the Cave of Blood, so called because the murder of Hābīl took place just above it and his blood ran downhill and onto the stone where it congealed and remains to this day, because the earth refused to absorb this blood. It can be seen there even today, as a sign of the first crime on earth.

Ādam عليه السلام beheld the blood and was dumbfounded. The cave then opened its mouth and spoke with its tongue which also can be still seen today in the Cave of Blood. It also wept for Hābīl, and will continue to weep until the Day of Resurrection.

The Mount Qāsiyūn is a high mountain, high above a waterless desert, yet there is water dripping in that cave, from both its eyes; and it weeps day and night for Hābīl who was killed here unjustly by his brother Qābīl, and the Cave bears witness to this murder.

There are two stones which testify against the children of Ādam ﷺ: one of them is the Black Stone of the Ka'ba, the *ḥajar-i aswad*, the other is the stone of the Cave of Blood, the *maghārat ad-dam*.

When Ādam ﷺ learned what had happened, he was greatly aggrieved and very angry, and he spoke to Qābīl, "Go, I disclaim all bond of kinship between me and thee, and none of my descendants shall speak to you or associate with you henceforth." So Qābīl took his wife and left, and they settled down below in the valley, where there was water.

Qābīl became the first man to worship idols, the first to drink wine and to perform harmful, useless actions. One day the devil came up to him and said, "Do you know the real reason why the fire accepted Hābīl's offering and not yours?" "Why is that?" he asked. "Because in secret he was worshipping the fire, though nobody knew about this, and for this reason his sacrifice was accepted. Now, if you also begin to worship the fire, your father will accept you back and make amends." So Qābīl began to worship the fire, not heeding his father's warning, for Ādam ﷺ was the first man and the first prophet.

At that time, Shayṭān was able to appear to people in human shape so that they did not know him. He used to do this up until the time of our Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, after that he lost this ability, nor was he able to rise to the heavens and eavesdrop on the angels in their heavenly council. People did not recognize him as Shayṭān, for he could assume a fair form, and take any person's shape.

After this Qābīl was cursed, and every time an unjust murder is committed, the sin is upon the murderer, and it is also attributed to Qābīl, up until the Day of Judgment. As for him who is unjustly murdered, his reward is that of a martyr, and the same reward is written every time for Hābīl as well.

When Qābīl had slain Hābīl, Ādam ﷺ was so aggrieved, he knew not what to do. He cried unto the Lord, saying, "O Lord, I am beside myself with sorrow, what shall I do?" The Lord said, "The earth is at your command." Ādam ordered the earth to beat Qābīl. The earth beat him. Qābīl cried, "O Lord, for the sake of Thy Name, reprieve me!" but the Lord heeded him not. Ādam repeated his order to the earth: "Beat him!" Qābīl again called upon the Lord to let him go, but the Lord gave no sign. Then Qābīl said: "O Lord, my father disobeyed Thee and the earth did not whip him for that; why does it now whip me for my disobedience?" Then the Lord spoke, "Your father disobeyed Me but once, whereas you have disobeyed both Me and your father." Then Ādam ﷺ repeated once more, "O Earth, whip him!" and it did so. Finally Qābīl cried, "O Lord, by Thy 99 Beautiful Names, set me free! Is not Thy Name the most Merciful of those who show Mercy?" There upon the Earth stopped beating him.

Abū ḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk reports: "When Ādam ﷺ first came down to earth, all the trees bore fruit and the waters of the sea were sweet; the lion did not hunt the ox, none of the animals preyed on one another. After Qābīl had slain his brother Hābīl some of the trees ceased producing edible fruit, the waters of the sea turned bitter and the animals began to hunt and destroy one another."

After this the children of Ādam ﷺ became plentiful and the Lord Almighty called Ādam ﷺ to be His prophet. Ādam ﷺ taught them all the Lord had enjoined him to teach. And the Lord sent to Ādam ﷺ ten Heavenly Scriptures, and instructed him to keep the fast of Ramadan. On the day of the breaking of the fast Ādam prayed: "O Lord, forgive me and all my sons who have fasted the month of Ramadan." The Lord answered, "Even before you asked, I have forgiven them all."

One day Ādam ﷺ had to leave his house to go on his business and he instructed Ḥawwā' to let nobody in. "The devils are abroad," he said, "and they might drop in to talk to you and deceive you. Let in nobody at all until I return."

When he had gone, a woman came and said to Ḥawwā', "I am on my way to market, please look after my little son while

I am away." Ḥawwā' answered her, "O my sister, my husband has strictly forbidden me to let anybody in." But the other one insisted for so long that Ḥawwā' finally gave in and accepted the child into the house. He was a terribly naughty little boy and did devilry of all sorts, and when Ādam عليه السلام came home, he knew at once that it was Shayṭān, and so he killed him. After a while the woman came back and asked, "Where is my son?" They said, "He is gone, we don't know where he went." So the woman began calling: "O *Waswās,* — a synonym for the devil: "the tempter who insinuates evil," — O *Waswās,* where are you?" The dead bones answered her, "Here I am, mother!" for he was the devil. The woman took them with her and left.

The next day Ādam عليه السلام again warned his wife not to let anyone in. As soon as he was gone, the woman came again and asked Ḥawwā' to look after her son. But this time Ḥawwā' refused and would not take him. The woman, however, forced him upon her and left. When Ādam عليه السلام came home he was very, very angry to see that Ḥawwā' had disobeyed him, and he shouted and beat her. In the end he slaughtered the devil child again, and sank him in a well. When the woman returned to fetch her son, they said, "He left, we don't know what has become of him." This time she called out, "Where are you, O *Waswās al-Khannās*?" — an epithet of the devil, meaning "he who withdraws when Allah's name is mentioned"—. Instantly his bones came back to life, and he left with his mother.

Again the very next day she reappeared before Ḥawwā' and wished to leave her son with her, but Ḥawwā' drove her away and would not have him, saying, "Go away, my husband scolds and beats me because of you, he goes wild when he sees your child — I will not have him, no thank you." But secretly the woman concealed the child in the house and Ḥawwā' had no knowledge of this. When Ādam عليه السلام came home this time he flew into a rage when he found the boy there again. Ḥawwā' protested that she knew nothing of it, the boy had been left in the house against her will. So Ādam عليه السلام killed him once more, put him in a pot and cooked him, then they ate him. After their meal, the woman came back and asked for her son.

They said, "He is gone." She called out, "Where are you, O *Waswās al-Khannās*?" He answered: "I am in the belly of the sons of Ādam, O mother." "Oh," she said, "that is a good place for you, you may stay there ..."

7 — THE DEATH OF ĀDAM عليه السلام

WHEN THE TIME decreed for Ādam's death approached, the Lord said to him, "Ādam, this coming Friday (*jumu'a*) I am going to take back your soul." Ādam عليه السلام heard this and wept. When he came to Ḥawwā' weeping she asked him for the cause of his sadness. He said to her, "I have received the news that on this *jumu'a* my soul will be taken from me by 'Azrā'īl, the Angel of Death." Ḥawwā' asked: "What is death like?" Ādam عليه السلام said, "O Ḥawwā' , death is worse than being sawn to pieces." Then Ḥawwā' also began to weep and cry, "Woe unto us, we were cast out of undying paradise gardens and now our lives on earth are ending, what will become of us after death?" Ādam said to her, "When we die, we are put in the earth, and the earth eats us, until we have become earth again." And they both wept.

After weeping for a while, Ādam عليه السلام said to Ḥawwā', "Do not weep overly much, for this draught of death has no end: whoever is born will die, our children and their grandchildren's grandchildren after them: not a soul but that it should taste of death."

Then on the appointed day the Angel of Death came and recited this verse: "*Every soul must taste of death*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:185]. And Ādam عليه السلام wept and cried in his agony. 'Azrā'īl عليه السلام said, "Why do cry so much?" Ādam عليه السلام replied, "O Angel of Death, will you take the souls of my children in like manner?" Said the angel, "Are you crying because you have to leave the world or are you weeping on account of your sins?" Ādam عليه السلام repeated his question: "How will you take the souls of my children, will it be for them as it is for me, for it is hard on account of my sin." Replied the angel, "Ādam, death for you will be very mild." Ādam عليه السلام raised his head to heaven and

prayed, "O Lord, ease the agonies of death for me and for those of my sons who are believers."

Ādam ﷺ had lived for 960 years. When the Angel of Death came to take his soul he said, "O 'Azrā'īl, what is the rush? Jibrā'īl has informed me that I would live to be one thousand years, that is how it is written on the tablets of destiny." The Angel of Death said, "The Lord has told me that you made over forty of your years to the Prophet Da'ūd, oh Ādam." Ādam ﷺ said, "Oh no, I remember no such thing, I have given him nothing." "Oh yes, you did," said 'Azrā'īl ﷺ. And all the angels bore witness to the fact that he had made over forty years to Da'ūd. The Lord said, "I grant you another forty years, O Ādam, so that your years might number 1000 altogether, and to Da'ūd I shall grant 100 full years from My Bounty."

'ABDULLĀH IBN 'ABBĀS ﷺ related: When Ādam's time came, he called to him his son Shīth ﷺ who was then 400 years old. Ādam ﷺ said: "O Lord, how is the taste of death?" The Lord answered, "The bitterness of death is more bitter than poison, death takes the life out of blood and flesh and all the limbs, and it takes the light from the countenance of men, so that they return to the earth from which they have sprung. You and all of your descendants will die. Every soul will taste of death, then I will raise you up again on the Day of Resurrection, and I will assemble all mankind on the Day of Reckoning, and each of you will be asked: what did you do while you were in the world, what did you give and what did you receive, and did you fulfill the law of Allah Almighty? And all will be dealt reward and punishment in accordance with their actions."

When Ādam ﷺ heard this speech he wept even more. The Earth then addressed him and said, "O Ādam, you were created from a clot of earth which the Lord took from me, now I am asking it back, you must become earth again." Man is created from clay, and everything he lives on throughout his life comes from the earth. In the end he is laid to rest in the earth and the earth eats him. All he has taken from it is returned.

Shīth ﷺ alone among all the sons of Ādam was born without a twin sister. When Ādam was on his death bed, he called Shīth

and said to him, "O my son, my legacy to you and to your sons consists of *five things*. These are:

Firstly, this world is empty and of a passing nature, make no mistake about that. I was in the *jannatu l-bāqī*, the everlasting paradise, I transgressed the law, and was forced to abandon that blissful abode.

Secondly, give little ear to the words of women, and if there is any doubt, ask your own reason. Had I thought about the matter of the forbidden fruit and asked my own reason, I would not have had all this cause for regret.

Thirdly, when you are about to undertake anything, consider its outcome. Had I considered the result of my action, I would not now find myself in this condition.

Fourthly, when your *nafs* commands you to act, oppose it and do the opposite.

Fifthly, in all your undertakings, take counsel. Had I consulted with the angels, I would not have fallen from my station."

When Ādam ﷺ finished speaking, he surrendered his soul, and Shīth ﷺ mourned for him.

'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās ﷺ relates: When death approached any of the prophets they were greatly upset by it and they were not pleased, except for the Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. When death came near to him, he said, "How good is this journey, for I am returning to my Lord."

Ādam ﷺ asked to behold the Angel of Death. He asked the Lord to show him death, saying, "I wish to see its shape." The Lord ordered the angel 'Azrā'īl ﷺ to show Ādam ﷺ the face of death, and his face was like the face of a ram. When Ādam ﷺ beheld his face, a great fear took hold of him, for it was very terrible, and he fell to the ground in a dead faint. The angels came to him and sprinkled his face with the water of life. When Ādam ﷺ came to he said, "O Lord, is this what death is like? Is it so particularly for me, or will it be the same for all of my sons?" The Lord answered, "It is the same for all created beings, as I have said: '*Every soul will taste of death, then they will be returned unto Me*' [The Spider, 29:57]. After having tasted death, the soul of the believer goes to 'Illiyīn, that of the disobedient servant goes to Sijjīn.

From KA'B AL-AḤBĀR: The Lord ordered 'Azrā'īl ﷺ, "Go to Ādam in a pleasant, agreeable form." The Angel of Death appeared only twice in a gracious and kind aspect: once to our father Ādam *Ṣafiyyullāh* (the Chosen of Allah) because he was the first man and the first prophet, and the second time to our noble Prophet Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ *Ḥabībullāh* (the Beloved of Allah)."

At last the Lord ordered 'Azrā'īl ﷺ to bring to Ādam ﷺ the draught of farewell, and Ādam emptied it, saying, "I am subservient to my Lord's command." The Angel of Death then said, "*As-salāmu 'alaykum*, peace be upon you, O Father of Mankind, do you know me?" "Yes, I know you," replied Ādam ﷺ, "but for what have you come?" "When you have emptied this cup, O Ādam, I will make you taste the bitterness of death." And Ādam drank the last draught, saying, "I am obedient to my Lord." Then 'Azrā'īl ﷺ took from him his soul.

All the angels assembled after Ādam ﷺ had died. They brought paradise water from the fount of Salsabīl and a winding sheet from the *janna*. They washed him and dressed him in three lengths of cloth. His son Shīth ﷺ prayed the funeral prayer over him, and all living beings came to his funeral, all that was between heavens and earth, and between the expanse of the horizons. Ādam ﷺ died on the forenoon of a Friday and his grave is on Mount Serendib in Sri Lanka.

Ḥawwā' mourned for forty days after his death, partaking neither of food nor drink, and she died forty years later. Other sources say it was only a year until her death, yet others claim she was buried with him. And Allah knows best. "*All things perish except His Face, His is the judgment, and unto Him you shall be returned.*" [The Story, 28:88]

None of us will remain in this world, all will pass on. Ādam's descent into this world occurred on account of a very minor sin which is in no way comparable to what his descendants committed after him, and yet he was expelled from paradise because of it. The wisdom of this is that Allah Almighty created Ādam ﷺ to be His representative on the earth, not in paradise. Had Ādam not left paradise, how should he have become His

deputy on earth? Thus the Lord caused him to commit this small disobedience, so that His will be done. Allah is *fa"ālun li-mā yurīd* [Hūd, 11:107], He who does whatever He wills.

The repentance of Ādam عليه السلام teaches us also that the Lord is *mujīb ad-d'ā'*, He who answers prayers. If a man repents sincerely after he has sinned, and returns unto his Lord, the Lord is merciful and forgiving, and restores him perfectly.

8 — SHĪTH عليه السلام

HEN QĀBĪL had slain Hābīl, Ādam عليه السلام and Ḥawwā' were much distressed and they wept for forty days. After the fortieth day, Jibrā'īl came to Ādam and ordered him to cease in his mourning. "I will give you another son," said the Lord, "who will look exactly like Hābīl." Jibrā'īl عليه السلام said to Ādam عليه السلام, "This son is going to be a prophet and a saint, and he will succeed you in the prophethood."

When this son was born (the only one to be born without a twin), they named him Shīth, which means a grant, a gift. And Shīth grew up to be a prophet, and Allah gave him the Light of Muḥammad, *nūr-i Muḥammadī*, which went with him wherever he turned. Allah Almighty revealed to Shīth 50 pages of heavenly scripture and Shīth عليه السلام called mankind to the service of the Lord. Some people followed him while others turned away. Shīth lived until he was 720 years of age, then he died, and Allah made Idrīs his successor. Shīth is one of the prophets called messengers because of the scripture revealed to him.

All in all one hundred pages of Heavenly Scripture were revealed: fifty of these came to Shīth, thirty to Idrīs, ten to Ādam, ten to Ibrāhīm; Da'ūd was given the Zabūr (the Psalms), 'Īsā the Injīl (the Gospels), and Muḥammad the Holy Qur'ān.

At first Ādam عليه السلام had one son, Hābīl, and he died. Allah gave him Shīth عليه السلام in his stead. Then there was Qābīl who slew Hābīl, and Ādam عليه السلام chased him away. He went away with his father's anger upon him, and he lived down below by the river and became the first person to do evil. He worshipped idols, drank wine and did many other forbidden things. The descendants of Shīth عليه السلام remained living on high ground and they were believers, while the sons of Qābīl lived below in the plains and along the banks of the water. They were many and

multiplied rapidly. In 1000 years the sons of Ādam ﷺ became very numerous.

The sons of Qābīl began to grumble against their grandfather Ādam ﷺ, saying, "If only our Father Ādam had not sinned, we would all still be sitting comfortably in Paradise rather than slaving here on earth and toiling to feed our families by the sweat of our brow. It is all his fault and we ought to take our revenge on him." So they came together and consulted with each other and decided to kill Ādam ﷺ. And they planned to accomplish this deed in a combined effort, so that they would all share the blame and none could be singled out and condemned. Because of this evil intention of theirs, the Lord changed their tongues so that each spoke in a different language and they could not understand each other any more. But Ādam ﷺ understood them all, for he was a prophet. So when they assembled to plan their crime, one could not understand what the other was saying, and they could come to no conclusion.

Each clan now had a different language, and they were dispersed over the earth and set up separate dwelling places in many lands. But the people of Shīth ﷺ populated the original land, Ādam ﷺ taught him to farm, and Shīth built houses with walls of stone and mud so that the children of Ādam no longer lived in caves and underneath trees as in the beginning. Shīth ﷺ founded 1000 cities and he, too, was one of the messengers.

The young men of the tribe of Shīth ﷺ who were living on the mountain were very handsome, while their girls were plain. The daughters of Qābīl's tribe were very beautiful, but their men were ugly. Shayṭān looked on and thought to himself, "These women are beautiful, and those men are good-looking ..." and he conceived evil thoughts.

Now there was a river flowing down from the mountains into the plains in which people used to bathe. Some young men from the mountain went down and said, "Why do we never see our relatives in the plains, they are, after all, our uncle's sons!" Others told them: "Ādam ﷺ has forbidden us to do so because they are bad people and if we mix with them we will be in danger of losing our faith and of being contaminated by their evil."

But there were some disobedient youths among them who were too curious and went down the river anyway to visit their relatives. They saw the lovely maidens of that tribe, and the girls saw them. They wondered why beauty was not married to beauty, and they began to mix with each other, and before long, unlawful copulation began to be practised and there arose great confusion and trouble in the land.

9 — IDRĪS عليه السلام

ROUND THIS TIME Idrīs عليه السلام was born and the Lord gave him discernment and clear perception. He was born of the sons of Shīth عليه السلام and his father was called Yard, a chieftain of his tribe. When the birth of a son was announced to him, he did not rejoice as he otherwise would have — for then as now, the birth of a son is acclaimed more joyfully than the birth of a daughter — but he was worried and said, "In times such as these, who can bring up a son to be righteous? He will most likely grow up to run after the loose girls down by the river ..." But when the child was shown to him he perceived upon his forehead the Light of Muḥammad ﷺ, and his heart was glad because he knew he would be one of the righteous. So he named him Idrīs, which means one who studies and teaches much.

According to the law of old, Idrīs عليه السلام was a shepherd before he became a prophet, as all prophets have herded sheep before their calling to prophethood and to the shepherding of men. Idrīs herded sheep until his thirtieth year. Wherever he went, he worshipped and prayed and held fast to the Law of the Lord. He was given to periods of intense study and he was the first man to write with a pen. He had an inventive mind and he was always busy designing improvements for the living conditions of his times.

The children of Ādam عليه السلام at first dressed in animal skins and leather garments, which was both cumbersome and a hindrance to their movements, as well as being a strong-smelling costume. So Idrīs عليه السلام set his mind to finding another way for the children of Ādam عليه السلام to clothe themselves. Only he and the believers dressed themselves at all in those days, the people of Qābīl all ran naked and laughed at the believers' modesty. Idrīs عليه السلام was now 65 years of age when he married Hadama, a gen-

tle, believing woman. One night he was leading his sheep into the fold which was roughly made of timber tied together with ropes and straw of date palm fibre. He contemplated this woven structure and thought to himself. "If only we could make clothes in this manner ..." Just then he beheld a spider spinning its thread and weaving it into its web. "*Subḥānallāh,*" he cried out. "Allah has shown me how to make cloth!" And he hurried home to his wife, taking with him some of his sheeps' wool.

Now our mother Ḥawwā' had been the first to spin wool, and from her Idrīs ﷺ had learnt the art. He now spun some wool and built himself a weaving loom, and began to weave. He worked very hard at this, and in six months he had completed a piece big enough to serve as a sheet. He took this to his wife and showed it to her, and she immediately said, "O my husband, teach me, so that together we might spin and weave cloth and make ourselves some new clothes." So they worked together, and it was a very difficult task in the beginning and they wished nobody to know what they were doing. They wove together until they had made enough fabric to make two gowns. Hadama was very happy when she had finished her piece and went to show her husband, and asked him, "Now how am I to wear this, how is sewing done?" And they tried on the cloth every way and did not know how to cut or piece it together to make a garment.

So for days they prayed, and asked the Lord to show them how to make a garment to cover their nakedness. At last Allah inspired Idrīs ﷺ. He laid out the cloth on the floor and told his wife Hadama to lie down upon it. She did as he bade her do. Then Idrīs ﷺ took a piece of coal and drew the outlines of her body on the cloth. Next he needed to cut the cloth, but he had no scissors. He went and fetched some sharp stones, placed the cloth between two cutting edges and beat it along the coal-drawn line. In this way the cloth was cut. In order to sew the pieces together, Idrīs ﷺ used some hard and pointed thorns, at the top of which he made a little hole. Into this he threaded some of the spun wool thread, and, lo, he had invented needle and thread. When the garment was stitched together, Hadama

tried it on, and Idrīs ﷺ found her much prettier in her new dress than in the skins and leather she had been wearing before. So Idrīs ﷺ became the first tailor.

Then his wife made clothes also for him, but they decided not to show themselves to the people in their new clothes until they had taught them about all the advantages of the new fabric, and this they did.

The Lord had given Idrīs ﷺ an enlightened mind and great intelligence. He taught him how to read and write, and to do sums, to read the stars and to find orientation by them. Idrīs ﷺ naturally became the teacher of his people and gathered all the young boys into his presence to impart to them his knowledge. He also knew the lore of healing plants, and he prepared herbal medicines to cure illnesses. When people fell ill in those days they believed it was the effect of some evil magic upon them, but Idrīs ﷺ taught them that it was from the Almighty, and that He who had sent them illness had also sent them remedies for their ailments. So Idrīs ﷺ was also the first doctor, and the Lord revealed to him many of the secrets of the secrets of Creation.

One day an injured person came to him with a cut that was heavily bleeding, and he did not know how to still the flow, Idrīs ﷺ took some clean wool and wrapped it around the wound, and healed him.

More and more people assembled around Idrīs ﷺ to be taught by him, and he was yet a young man and had not entered his prophethood. He studied and taught the divinely revealed messages of Ādam ﷺ and Shīth ﷺ and wrote them down and made them into books. And because it is written: "*and We have honoured the Children of Ādam*" [The Night Journey, 17:70], he taught people that man has the obligation to aspire to the highest goal of spirituality, and not to remain stationary as the animals.

One day, however, the young boys did not show up for their lesson. Wondering about this, he inquired, and heard that their parents would no longer permit them to attend. "You are teaching our sons knowledge which divides us from our people," they said, "it is a form of magic." Idrīs ﷺ was puzzled

how they could change their minds from one day to the next, but before long a crowd of people gathered around his house, armed with sticks and stones, led by one ambitious individual who envied Idrīs ﷺ his position and wished to be head of the tribe himself. Idrīs' students came to warn him to hide himself or to flee, so that they would not kill him.

Idrīs ﷺ replied, "Leave me to reason with them." And he went out and talked to his enemy. He spoke to him, "So you are the cause of all this trouble, just because you wish to be the leader of the tribe — but it was my father whom the people elected to be their chief, and he is a just man and loves his people." "That may be," replied the other, "but I will not let you sit in his seat, I am going to remove you from this world. You are causing division among the people through the knowledge you are teaching them, and your influence is harmful altogether."

Idrīs ﷺ said: "What have I done to you, O people, have I not taught you all manner of useful things, how to kindle fire, to build houses, to sew clothes?" Then the people bethought themselves and realized that, indeed, Idrīs ﷺ had done nothing but good for them. At that moment, the dissenter sneezed, and something black came out of his nose. People wanted to know what it was and he explained to them that it was on account of the smoke from their fires that had entered his nose and caused soot to collect in it, but one of the students of Idrīs ﷺ who knew him well said, "No, it is something else: I know that he mixes certain dried plants and places them at the end of a straw, then he sets fire to the mixture and inhales the smoke and it alters his state of mind." Then they all cried, "This is a forbidden thing, it is like the drinking of wine, it makes you drunk, this is hashish — you have learnt this from the tribe of Qābīl, and you are a spy among us to take away our sons, to estrange them from us, so that they will not return." And they seized him by his belt, and found wrapped up therein his smoking mixture and also his pipe. They took it from him and he was very angry and began to tremble.

Then he turned and fled towards the valley. There in a quiet spot, he lit a fire and had another smoke in order to feel himself

strong, and he called out, "O you foolish ones, you are surely to be pitied for following one who calls you to worship something you cannot see or know — come with me, and I will show you something to worship that you can see, gods of fire, wood and stone. Who is this Allah, who has ever seen him? I believe in nothing I do not see!"

His students returned to Idrīs ﷺ and reproached their elders for having so little faith. "You are created Muslims," they said, "and you have the revelations of Ādam ﷺ and Shīth ﷺ, while those people live with the Wrath of God upon them and Shayṭān dwells in their midst." And people agreed and repented and returned to their faith.

But Idrīs ﷺ was troubled and went to his father and asked him, "O my father, what have I done wrong? I have taught them to the best of my ability, and now they threaten to turn away and to follow an impostor who will lead them astray, on account of my shortcomings." "No," answered his father Yard, "it is not your fault, you have taught them to distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil, they are surely misled by Shayṭān, the Accursed."

Now Idrīs's days were lengthening and he was 250 years old when he was given prophethood. Jibrā'īl ﷺ revealed it to him and said, "That disobedient folk is preparing to rise against you, and they intend to make trouble and to destroy you. You must prepare to wage a holy war against them." "What must we do?" asked Idrīs ﷺ. "You must make a *jihād* and you will vanquish them, for they are weak, and the Word of Truth is with you." And Jibrā'īl ﷺ instructed Idrīs ﷺ to make new weapons for the Muslims. Idrīs ﷺ was inspired: one day he was picking apples, and he bent down a branch and as he let go of it, it sprang back and propelled the apple across a great distance, much further than Idrīs could have thrown it. From this he took the idea of the bow, and he fashioned one from branches, and arrows to match it, and he practised using it. Also, he had observed how sometimes there were veins of metal in the stones which people used to build around their cooking fires, and he had seen these melt in the heat and become hard again in the cold. So he

hewed mines into the earth and extracted metal, and worked it into swords and spears, as the angel taught him to do, and the women spun rope.

He announced to his people that there would be a holy war, a *jihād* against the unbelievers. They queried, "Is this your order or is it a command from the Lord?" He said, "It is an absolute command from our Lord, and we shall wait until the time comes." Meanwhile Idrīs ﷺ instructed his people in the use of the new weapons, taught them how to shoot arrows from their bows and to hit far-off targets, how to lasso moving objects with a rope, in order to take prisoners, and how to manage spears and swords. But the people, though they admired the artifacts greatly, were loathe to use them against any of their fellow men, and they told Idrīs ﷺ that it pained them to shed the blood of any man. Idrīs ﷺ said to them, "You are right, it is a great sin to shed the blood of any man unjustly, but we will be attacked by people who intend to kill us and to destroy the light of Truth; we are fighting for a holy cause, for the Divine Word of Truth, for our country and for our honour, and it will be a battle in the way of Allah." Jibrā'īl ﷺ also revealed to him, "The Lord is pleased with you, O Idrīs, and with those who are with you; those among them who die in the *jihād* which is to follow will die as martyrs and go to heaven, while those who die on the enemy lines will go to hell, as they fight for the sake of Shayṭān, and you for the cause of Raḥmān."

The enemies had been preparing their attack for a whole year, already, they practised and exercised and met in competitions, they dug trenches and prepared instruments of siege. They constructed catapults for hurtling stones against city walls and all manner of murderous machines. But they delayed their attack until the time of the harvest, for they planned to fall upon the land, kill all its believing inhabitants, and to pillage the crops, whatever they might find of harvested dates and wheat and olives, for they kept no winter stores themselves. And in anticipation of their successful exploits, they drank and feasted and made merry, celebrating with all manner of licentiousness.

When the autumn came, many thousands of them set out, each carrying his own wines-kin and food, while there were no more than 1000 Muslims. Idrīs ﷺ sent out spies to watch their approach and he learnt that they planned to attack that very night. He let them approach close enough for the Muslims to see them and for them to understand just how intent the enemy was on their extermination. Then he gave orders for the *jihād* to begin. Every Muslim hid behind a rock or boulder with his weapons.

At day break the enemy army had reached the mountain-side. Suddenly, from behind the rocks came a shower of arrows, each of which unfailingly hit its target to the great consternation of the unbelievers. They could not understand how so many of them fell dead after being hit only by these little bits of wood, furthermore over such a great distance, and they fell into disarray and confusion.

The next day they staged a new attack from a different direction, and this time they were met by a rain of spears and swords and they were routed and driven to flight. Many of them were taken captive by means of the ropes that the Muslim women had made. Opinions among the Muslims were divided as to what to do with the prisoners, some people wanted to kill them right away, others favoured letting them go so as not to have to feed them, but Idrīs ﷺ, their prophet told them, "We will keep them and use their manpower. They are in our hands and cannot do us any harm. We will put them to work in the making of our weapons, they can do the heavy labour of chipping the stones, cutting the trees, smelting the iron that we need for our swords and spears." And Idrīs ﷺ addressed the captives and gave them the choice of becoming Muslim and their brothers in Islam or of remaining slaves. Seeing the people of Idrīs ﷺ living in harmony and justice with each other, many of them embraced the faith, while others did not and became slaves.

The enemy had retreated and had taken with them some of the arrows they pulled from the dead bodies of their companions, and tried to make imitations of this wondrous weapon, but they could not understand how it was propelled to enter a

body and kill a man. Time passed. Eventually they ventured on furtive raids into the country and captured some shepherds of Idrīs's people and pressed them into telling them the secret. But the shepherds would not yield the secret. They then tortured and beat them to death, without being able to wrest the information from them, and these shepherds died as martyrs. One old man said, "We will not learn their secret until we go and live among them." So they dressed in the clothes of those shepherds and went to the mountain and lived in a cave, posing as Muslims. In six months they had discovered how to make a bow to shoot the arrows, and they went back to their people to tell them. Meanwhile the Muslims busied themselves with making new weapons, for they knew that they would be attacked again. Idrīs ﷺ also taught them to store food away for the winter so they would not suffer any deprivation during the barren season, and they began to dry figs and dates and raisins, and store their wheat and barley. The unbelievers knew nothing of these wise ways.

The next year they saw another army of unbelievers approaching, even more numerous than the first and they saw that this time they had with them bows and arrows like theirs. They came to Idrīs ﷺ in despair, saying, "What shall we do? The enemy by far outnumbers us and they have learnt to use our weapons, and surely we will be defeated." Idrīs ﷺ addressed them and said, "Take heart! In addition to our weapons we have also our faith, and Allah Almighty strengthens our hearts. Through faith Allah enables us to fight bravely and to stand together, while the unbelievers stand alone: each of them fights for himself and for his own material gain. You may deem them many but their hearts are divided while our hearts are united in our common purpose, and the cause of Truth." They then fought a second battle and the Muslims were victorious, and the unbelievers were scattered and routed worse than before.

After this, they repeated their attacks more frequently, coming not only in the autumn, but also in other months. Idrīs ﷺ was troubled, thinking, "How can we go about our normal business when we have to be on the defensive all the time? Our

men will grow weary. We must expand our territory right up to the shores of the sea and the banks of the river so that it will be more easily defensible and that there will be safety within its borders." So for some time Idrīs عليه السلام went out to survey the land. One day he came upon a cowherd who sat watching his grazing herd of cattle and was singing to himself, "If only I could train you as we have trained the dogs, I would chase you upon the unbelievers and you would vanquish them." Idrīs عليه السلام listened to his song, and thought, "He is right. Only the cows are too slow and peaceful for warfare — we need an animal which we can ride and which does not tire, an animal that may bear loads and the weight of a man." He could think of no animal more suitable for this than the camel, so he trained camels for that purpose. He brought his people the camel and taught them to tame and to ride it.

Each time they attacked, the unbelievers came in greater numbers. They had meanwhile learned to make all the weapons that the Muslims had, but in the next encounter, the Muslims had the additional advantage of being mounted. As a result, of their army of 50,000 only four men returned alive. Their chief said, "This will not do, we will also train camels, and then by our greater number we will be sure to win."

So Idrīs عليه السلام set out again in search of new means for fighting the unbelievers. He roamed the steppes and plains and came across a herd of beautiful animals that he recognized as the animals his grandfather Ādam عليه السلام had described to him, having seen them in Asia on his way from India. They were horses, and they did not shy away from Idrīs عليه السلام. He realized this was a sign from his Lord and he led them away and tamed them easily, till they ate grass from his hand. He showed them to his people and each man trained his own horse. But they soon realized that their horses were very delicate and would not tolerate great heat or cold, or harsh conditions of hunger and thirst, and they began to wonder whether it was a blessing or a curse, for they had to look after them as after their own children. They appointed horsemen to look after pasturing the horses, and these preferred what the cows had left behind.

So with their swift-footed horses the Muslims were more victorious than ever before, and they took all the surrounding land to the Red Sea, along both its shores, including the Hijaz and Mecca. And the tribe of Idrīs ﷺ multiplied and prospered.

Yet the unbelievers also became ever more numerous, and in time they all fell under the domination of an exceedingly evil king, named Zahaq, who usurped all their belongings and kept people like sheep. Idrīs ﷺ fought against this evil king with all his might and trained the believers so well in the arts of warfare that they always emerged victorious from battle, yet the war against evil could not be won.

Towards the end of his life Idrīs ﷺ retired from his worldly occupations and betook himself to a cave to devote himself to a life of contemplation and worship. One day he simply disappeared from the sight of the world and through the ages it was unknown what had happened to him, until the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān where it is written: "*And mention in the Book Idrīs: he was a true man, a prophet. We raised him up to a high place.*" [Maryam, 19:56–57]

Along his life, Idrīs ﷺ worked incessantly for the good of his people, and he prayed and worshipped as much as all the people of his time put together. The angels smelled the scent of his goodness and piety and they felt a longing for his company, so they asked the Lord, "Permit us to visit this man who does so much good in the world, truly, we long to meet him." The Lord answered them, "He is My prophet Idrīs ﷺ and you may visit him." So the angels began to visit Idrīs ﷺ, and among them was the Angel of Death. But the Angel of the Sun became the particular friend of Idrīs ﷺ. Idrīs would always sit under a tree engaged in his *dhikr* and gaze at the sky. The angel came to see him every second day.

One day he said to him, "O my friend, you come and pay me visits here on the earth, can I not visit you one day in your heavenly mansions?" The angel said, "I have no permission to take you there." "Go and ask the Lord if I might not go with you." The angel went to ask the Lord and obtained permission for Idrīs ﷺ to be his guest in the heavens. So he flew Idrīs up

to the heavens and showed him his realm and sat him upon his throne, honouring him as his guest. Idrīs ﷺ asked, "Tell me, how much remains of my lifespan?" The Angel of the Sun replied, "I cannot know, that is written upon the Preserved Tablets." "Be pleased to have a look," said Idrīs. "That I cannot do without the Lord's permission," the angel said. "So ask His permission," demanded Idrīs, and the angel went and did so. The Lord said, "Whatever he asks of you, do it for him." The angel then went and asked the angel appointed as guardian of the Preserved Tablets who told him, "That man will not surrender his soul until he is seated on the throne of the angel governing the sun."

Now the Angel of the Sun hurried back, for he had left Idrīs ﷺ sitting on this very throne, and he returned to find him dead upon it. The Angel of the Sun then wept and said, "O my Lord, I have brought Idrīs here as a guest how will I bring him back now as a dead man? O Lord, give him back his soul so that I might return him in safety to his people." The Lord answered the angel's prayer, and Idrīs ﷺ awoke as if from a deep sleep and asked the angel what had happened. "You have died," said the angel. "I died?" asked Idrīs, "so now show to me Hell." With the Lord's permission the angel carried him to the top of the bridge of Ṣirāṭ from which he looked down into Hell and saw all its divisions. Then Idrīs ﷺ wished to see Paradise. When they arrived there, Idrīs beheld Paradise in all its splendour and glory, and never had anything pleased him more. Eventually the angel urged him to return, but Idrīs ﷺ said, "No I am staying here. This is my place." "How can you say this," said the angel, "you must come with me and cause me no trouble." "No," repeated Idrīs, "this is my place. I will abide here, as the Lord has said: 'Every soul will taste of death' — I have tasted of death. And He also says, ' ...they shall abide and not come forth from there forever more ...' I have crossed the bridge of Ṣirāṭ, seen Hell, and entered into Paradise — and none who enters his paradise will ever leave it." The Lord then spoke, "I confirm all My servant Idrīs has spoken, it is good, leave him there."

So Idrīs ﷺ is now living in paradise, and according to one narration he tailors the robes for the people of paradise. On the night of *mi'rāj*, the night of his ascension to the heavens, our Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ met him either in the fourth or in the seventh heaven, and Idrīs ﷺ and all the other prophets greeted him there as well.

And Allah knows best all the secrets of the heavens and the earth.

10 — LĀMAK AND THE KING ZAHAQ

THE PROPHET IDRĪS ﷺ begat sons and grandsons, and among them was a young man named Lāmak. When he grew up, he became restless and wished to travel to explore other lands, for his country was a rocky and barren desert. He obtained his father's and grandfather's consent and set out on his way. He travelled towards the lowlands by the coast. After he had journeyed for about a week, he was hungry and tired. He came to a land situated between two great rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, and there he came upon a person living in a cave. Lāmak greeted him and told him where he had come from and that he was hungry. The man said, "I have nothing to give you, go back to where you came from." "You do not even ask me my name?" wondered Lāmak. "Why should I ask your name or want to know who you are or where you come from — are you not of the children of Ādam, and do you not eat bread and meat like everyone else? I have nothing much to say to you ..." Lāmak wondered at the man's inhospitality and left him, taking his road down to the fair river banks where there was lush, green vegetation.

There he met a pretty young maid who fled as soon as she saw him. "Why are you running from me?" he asked her. "I am fleeing from the wild beasts." "What sort of animals do you have here, are there lions and tigers or bears and wolves?" asked Lāmak. "No," she said, "I am fleeing from mankind, they are the wildest beasts of all." And she cried and wept bitterly.

"Where are you planning to flee to?" asked Lāmak. "I am running towards the Ka'ba," she said, pointing in the direction of Mecca, "perhaps I will find a kinder people there, and more high-minded." "So we are of one kind," Lāmak told her, "I am of the people of Shīth and not like the people of this land."

The girl said, "If it is so, we may talk. My family consisted of twenty members and they have all perished; some were killed by snakes, some by their fellowmen, or they were led off into captivity, I am the only one to escape. That is why I am fleeing from this land." Lāmak said, "Accept me as your brother." "No," she said, "then you will abandon me." "Accept me then as your father." "Then you will sell me." "Accept me as your husband." "By the command of the Lord, it shall be so," and she accepted him. Lāmak was then 100 years old and not yet married.

They returned to her house which was well kept and undamaged. Her neighbour saw them coming and asked, "Who is that?" She replied, "He is my husband, come and perform the ceremony for us." The neighbour was glad that she had found a protector and they proceeded to write the contract without delay.

They had been married and living together happily for about a month or two, when Lāmak looked out one day and saw some caves in the distance. He asked her about them and she answered, "By the command of our king, all people must go and visit those caves at certain appointed times, and we, too must go." Now the king of that land was a certain Zahaq, and he was very powerful and had declared himself to a god. For one day when he was sitting by himself, the devil came to him in disguise and convinced him that he now had power over all things, and that he would be god on earth. The devil's helpers served him as spies, and so he had hidden ears in every house which reported to the king every thing they saw and heard, and from that a great fear spread throughout the land. This king grew monstrous and lived only on human flesh, especially the flesh of tender children. It was sacrificial rites and ceremonies that took place in those caves which Lāmak had been gazing at.

People were made to go there, and they never knew whether they would return.

So, as it was the custom of that land, Lāmak and his wife made ready to go to those caves at the time of the great festival that took place once a year. The country was then called Hob, later it became known as Babylon. Great crowds of people assembled there, and everybody was made to strip their clothes, according to the custom and protocol of the evil king. Zahaq was of the sons of Qābīl, and he had made five idols in his own image, and many others in form of animals and monstrous shapes. He was also the first person to employ pipes and horns and flutes. When he blew on his horn, the whole crowd fell down and prostrated themselves before their master, when he blew a second time, they rose up again and sang his praises, trembling with fear. For the king was frightful to behold. Lāmak went up close to have a good look at him, and he saw a man of broad and tall stature with long hair which entwined with his beard; but the strangest thing about him was that in the place where his neck should have been there was a protuberance which resembled the head of a snake, with a snake's tongue darting in and out of its mouth. For this strange and miraculous growth people held him to be divine.

Lāmak regarded this monstrosity and said, "This may seem to be a snake, but in reality it is a disease ..." People around told him to hush, but Lāmak saw the king's face distort as if in great pain, and his officers proclaimed, "O people see, our Lord and Majesty, the King-Snake is in Pain; he needs to drink a human brain; who wishes to sacrifice himself for the sake of his Majesty?" Lāmak heard this call and thought that no one would voluntarily offer himself up, but to his surprise people competed with each other to be the first, and to be fed to the Snake-King. Two men were chosen and tied down, then they cracked open their skulls and the snake's mouth sucked up their blood and brains. After the snake had eaten, the signs of pain disappeared from the king's face and he resumed his normal aspect. Then Lāmak was certain that it was a disease from the devil. After this presentation they began shooting down children with ar-

rows, but nobody seemed upset about this, for the people believed that as soon as they died, their souls would be placed in better and more perfect bodies, and they deemed it a great honour to be devoured by the horrible snake. They believed that when their blood mingled with that of the monster they too would attain degrees of divinity. So they vied with each other to be sacrificed and to have their children slaughtered for three whole days in that cave, and that was the form their worship took. And we seek refuge with the Almighty from such abomination.

Lāmak and his wife returned to their home, horrified at what they had witnessed but unable to change anything. At the gathering they had noticed one of the officers of the king watching them closely and Lāmak's wife was much afraid. The next day this man came to their house and said, "Do you not know who I am?" "No, we do not know you," they answered. "I am of the officers of Zahaq," he said. "And what do you want with us?" "You do not know me, but I know you, O Lāmak," said the man. "How do you know my name, I am a stranger in this land?" "How should I not know you, you are the grandson of Idrīs ﷺ, and I too am one of the believers. I have mingled with this fiendish folk and become one of the officers of that king so that I might learn their secrets in order to destroy them. I have learnt that they are planning a great war against the believers, and we must send a message to Idrīs ﷺ so that he will prepare the Muslims for their coming." "But how shall we send that message all the way to the people of Idrīs ﷺ on the mountain?" asked Lāmak. The man said: "I have ten followers here also in disguise, and I will send them to him."

11 — NŪḤ عليه السلام

FTER A YEAR or so, Lāmak's wife gave birth to a son and they named him Shākir, because of his sweetness and they also named him Nūḥ. Nūḥ from the start was unlike other children, for on his forehead he bore the Light of Muḥammad ﷺ, and it was visible wherever he turned. This light passed on from one womb to the next; when a woman became pregnant with one of the forebears of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, that light appeared on her face for as long as she carried that child, and when she gave birth, it passed onto the child. The parents of Nūḥ were believers, but they kept their religion hidden from the people of the land they lived in, for they were disbelieving folk. As every prophet worked at some kind of a craft, Nūḥ used to fashion objects of wood, and they were very ingenious and cleverly designed and resembled little boats. And his parents looked on and wondered at his ideas.

When he was 30 years of age he said to his parents, "Grant me leave, I desire to go and see all the land which is under the command of the king Zahaq." His father gave him leave, providing he would be back by nightfall. It was only a three hours' journey into the city from where they lived. So Nūḥ عليه السلام went forth, and on his way he passed groups of people who were being made to work as slaves and doing hard labour, and they were being cruelly mistreated and whipped and beaten, and Nūḥ was very upset at their suffering. Then he came to the great palace of the king, and he thought, "For this they are mistreating people in such a cruel way, just so they might increase their wordly splendour — Allah Almighty will give them no satisfaction in their works." While he was yet engaged in these reflections, a man came up to him and asked, "How do you like our grand palace? And what do you think of our city?" Nūḥ

said, "It is all right, but it is lacking some refinement. I will work for you and show you what I mean." So for ten years he worked for them, always returning home to his parents at night-time, and the unbelievers had never seen the like of his work. He carved and designed all the wood-work for the palace, its doors, windows and cabinets, and he became known through out the land for the high standard of his workmanship.

Ten years passed. When Nūḥ ﷺ was forty years of age, he came home one night, and wished to have his bath and to pray. His mother saw him standing looking out into the distance, and asked him what he was looking at. "I am coming right back, mother," he said and left the house. Having left the house, he went towards the mountain, and did not return for ten years, and no one knew whether he was alive or dead.

After ten years he returned, and called out to the household, "Mother, father, I am back, your son has returned." But no one answered him. He went in to find his father alone, immobilized by paralysis, he could hardly speak, and of his mother there was no sign at all. "Where is my mother?" he cried, and with great difficulty his father indicated that she had died and was buried beneath a rosebush in a corner of the yard. "What has happened to you, O my father?" "We found a plant, three years ago, and we ate of it, and it was poisonous. Your mother died of its effects, and I have been in this condition ever since. A kindly neighhour comes to look after me." And he also said to Nūḥ ﷺ, "Down by the river there is a spring; if I bathe in it, I will improve." So Nūḥ ﷺ took his father down to the spring every day and slowly he regained his health.

When it was easier for him to speak, he asked, "O my son, where have you been all these years that we missed you, what were you doing and what did you see?" Nūḥ replied, "O my father, when I looked at yonder mountain, I beheld what first appeared to be a mist, then it became a light, then it turned into the shape of a man, and he said to me, "Come, come!" And when I heard these words from him, it was beyond my power to resist, that is why I left so suddenly. It was the angel Mīkā'īl ﷺ calling me, the angel who arranges the provisions

and sustenance for all creatures, and he showed to me the whole world." "And what did you see, O my son?" "O father, wherever I went I saw people being oppressed, being ill-treated and miserable on account of the dangerous and harsh conditions imposed on them by their oppressors. As soon as men get ahead in life, they resort to oppressing those who remain on the level they have just left. I saw injustice and dissatisfaction everywhere." "And what else did you see?" "I went to Yemen, also, and there I saw the same conditions." "Did you go to the Ka'ba at Mecca?" "Yes, I went there too, and it is still standing, but there are no believers left in that place to circumambulate it. The unbelievers have advanced towards the holy lands until they reached the Ka'ba, and they massacred everyone they found there and laid all their houses to waste. Now that Idrīs ﷺ has disappeared from the world of living men, they are seriously seeking to stamp out Islam. They have placed their idols in Allah's holy house, and they do every forbidden thing on that sacred ground, stopping short of nothing and going beyond all limits in their acts of disobedience and immorality. All of their corruption they perform with religious fervour, all have come under the sway of Zahaq and Shayṭān, his associate."

Nūḥ ﷺ was now fifty years of age. One night he woke up his father and said, "O my father, the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ has come to me and called me to prophethood that I might call people back to their Lord and to the Way of Truth. To this cause I must henceforth devote my life."

Nūḥ ﷺ was the first of the prophets who had to call people back from total moral and spiritual corruption, from the very worst conditions they could have fallen into. In the time of Ādam ﷺ, people had only his example to follow and they were not yet corrupted; the people of Shīth ﷺ did not mix with the unbelievers, and Idrīs ﷺ had only to defend his religion when attacked. But Nūḥ ﷺ had to go out into a spiritual wilderness, for the people of that time had forgotten everything, they had become degraded and knew not right from wrong. So Nūḥ ﷺ needed to start again from the beginning. Nūḥ ﷺ received no

new scripture, he called people back to the books they had already received through the previous messengers.

When Nūḥ ﷺ set out to call his people back to the Truth, they scorned and mistreated him, and never accepted his call. As it is recalled in the Holy Qur'ān:

"We sent Nūḥ to his people, saying, 'Warn thy people, for there come on them a painful chastisement.' He said, ,o my people I am unto you a clear warner, saying, 'Serve Allah, and fear Him and obey you me, and He will forgive you your sins and defer you to a stated term; Allah's term, when it comes, cannot be deferred did you but know." [Nūḥ, 71:1–4]

First of all Nūḥ ﷺ went and addressed the poor and told them about the unseen god. They all laughed and ridiculed him. He said to them, "Who has created the sun, the moon and the stars?" "They were created by the order of Zahaq," people told him, "he created them and set them in motion." "Nay," said Nūḥ ﷺ "even Zahaq is only a created being, he eats and drinks, and he is of mankind and one day he must die, how can he be God?"

Nūḥ ﷺ had a horse and a camel and Allah gave them speech and they roamed through the lands, calling out: *lā ilāha illā llāh Nūḥ rasūlallāh,* but people threw stones at them whenever they saw them passing and said, "This is some kind of magic." However much they beat and mistreated these animals, by the Grace of Allah Almighty they recovered by the following morning.

Nūḥ ﷺ kept on with his preaching for 950 years as he was commanded by his Lord, and he ceased not to exert himself for the sake of his people, nor did he tire of their constant mistreatment. After that time, he prayed to his Lord:

"Nūḥ said: 'My Lord, they have rebelled against me, and followed him whose wealth and children increase him only in loss, and have devised a mighty device and have said, 'Do not leave your gods, and do not leave Wadd, nor Suwā', Yaghūth, Ya'ūq, neither Nasr!' And they have led many astray. Increase Thou not the evildoers save in error!'" [Nūḥ, 71:21–24].

The unbelievers had five idols which were made in the image of Zahaq. But to make it possible for everybody to worship them, these idols were carried about the land by envoys, and

they came to be known by the names of these viziers who carried them, i. e., Wadd, Suwā', Yaghūth, Ya'ūq and Nasr.

After preaching in vain to his people for 950 years Nūḥ prayed to his Lord against this obstinate folk:

"... *My Lord, leave not upon the earth of the unbelievers even one. Surely, if Thou leavest them, they will lead Thy servants astray, and will beget none but unbelieving libertines.*" [Nūḥ, 71:26–27]

Even the children of that time were unbelieving and rebellious. During the time of his prophethood, in 950 years, it is said that Nūḥ ﷺ succeeded in calling only 80 persons to the true faith, among them three of his sons. One other son remained a disbeliever, as did his wife. If a woman opposes her husband in religious matters, her punishment will be to be resurrected along with the wives of Nūḥ and Lūṭ, both of whom believed not, and may Allah preserve us from their fate.

When Allah's Command came for Nūḥ ﷺ to build the ark, he grew afraid and said, "O Lord, will You destroy all the people in the world? Surely there are innocent ones among them, and the blameless animals?" The Lord replied, "It is written with the ink of Eternity that I shall destroy all the disobedient."

"*Indeed, We sent Nūḥ to his people, and he tarried among them a thousand years, all but fifty: so the Flood seized them, while they were evildoers. Yet We delivered him and those who were in the ship and appointed it for a sign, unto all beings.*" [The Spider, 29:14–15]

"*And We sent Nūḥ to his people; and he said, 'O my people, serve Allah!' You have no god other than He. Will you not be god fearing?' Said the Council of the unbelievers of his people. 'This is not but a mortal like yourselves who desires to gain superiority over you. And if Allah willed, He would have sent down angels. We never heard of this among our fathers, the ancients. He is naught but a man bedeviled; so wait on him for a time.'*

He said, 'O my Lord, help me, for that they cry me lies.'

Then We said to him, 'Make Thou the Ark under Our eyes and as We reveal, and then, when Our command comes and the oven boils, insert in it two of every kind and thy family — except for him against whom the word already has been spoken; and address Me not concerning those who have done evil; they shall be drowned.

Then, when thou art seated in the Ark and those with thee, say, Praise belongs to Allah who has delivered us from the people of the evildoers.'

And say, 'O my Lord, do Thou harbour me in a blessed harbour, for Thou art the best of harbourers.' Surely in that are signs, and surely We put to the test." [The Believers, 23:23–30]

More than 2000 years had elapsed between the time of Ādam ﷺ and the time of Nūḥ ﷺ. Gradually people had forgotten the teachings of the prophets and fallen to ever greater depths of corruption and idolatry. Throughout his long life Nūḥ ﷺ preached to his people, but they regarded him only as a madman and would not take his words seriously.

"*He said, 'My Lord, I have called my people by night and by day, but my calling has only increased them in flight. And whenever I called them, that Thou mightest forgive them; they put their fingers in their ears, and wrapped them in their garments, and persisted, and waxed very proud.'*" [Nūḥ, 71:5–7]

Nūḥ ﷺ lived with his family, and he had four sons, three of these were believers: Sām, Ḥām and Yāfith, but the fourth, Yam or Kan'ān was a disbeliever as was his mother. Nūḥ's wife used every opportunity to go against her husband. Behind his back she would ridicule him, and she made his life hard. That is why she is mentioned together with the wife of Lūṭ in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Allah has struck a similitude for the unbelievers: the wife of Nūḥ, and the wife of Lūṭ; for they were under two of Our righteous servants, but they betrayed them, so they availed them nothing whatsoever against Allah; so it was said, 'Enter, you two, the Fire with those who enter.'*" [The Forbidding, 66:10]

For several hundreds of years Nūḥ ﷺ called his people to the way of truth and received nothing but abuse in return. People became worse and worse, and finally Nūḥ ﷺ gave up hope of improving them. During the last years before the Great Flood which was to come, a great drought beset the land, for forty years not a drop of rain fell, and a whole generation had never seen or known the blessed rain. All the land dried up and the dry earth threw up salty crusts. Food became scarce. The women also turned barren, no more children were born during the

last forty years before the flood. Asked by his sons about this he told them, "The Lord is about to punish this people, therefore He is sending no more innocent souls into the world — for the children of all times and all peoples are blameless — so that the innocent may not suffer." Still people would not heed the warning, and at last Nūḥ ﷺ prayed to the Lord:

"*And Noah said, 'My Lord, leave not upon the earth of the unbelievers even one. Surely if Thou leavest them, they will lead Thy servants astray, and will beget none but unbelieving libertines.*" [Nūḥ, 71:26–27]

The Lord heard his prayer and revealed to Nūḥ ﷺ that He was about to answer it, and send destruction upon the whole world. When Nūḥ ﷺ realized that his curse was actually going to come into effect, and that all living beings on earth would perish, save those whom the Lord would spare, he paled with fear and awe. The Lord then spoke to Nūḥ ﷺ, "Know, O My Prophet, that before the world was created, before eternity existed, it was already written that these people would be drowned in a great flood." Hearing this Nūḥ ﷺ began to wail and lament loudly, and some reports say this is why he was called Nūḥ, because it means 'to wail, to lament'.

After the Divine Decree was revealed to the prophet, Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to Nūḥ ﷺ with the Command for him to build the Ark. The first problem for him was to find wood and timber with which to build it.

In the time of Ādam ﷺ a giant was born to one of the daughters of Ādam ﷺ and his name was 'Uj. 'Uj grew up to disbelieve in the Almighty, and Allah gave him a long life, but he was always hungry. He could never find enough food to satisfy him. He caught fish from the sea with his bare hands and fried them in the sun, and not much distinguished him from a wild animal.

This giant 'Uj was still alive at the time when Nūḥ ﷺ was about to build his ark. 'Uj used to help people with his gigantic strength and carry wood down from the mountains and forests, and in return he would expect a meal. But however much they set before him, he always rose feeling still hungry, and not once in his life had his belly been filled. Now, Jibrā'īl ﷺ told Nūḥ to commission 'Uj to fetch the wood for the Ark, and that

one arm-load would suffice. Nūḥ ﷺ called for the giant 'Uj to come, and he came swiftly running, each of his steps as long as a man's range of vision. With his head above the clouds, he asked Nūḥ ﷺ, "What will you give me if I work for you?" Nūḥ ﷺ answered, "I will feed you a meal that will fully satisfy your hunger, for the first time in all your life." So 'Uj went off and fetched an armload of wood. When he placed it on the ground it was such a pile that it blocked the view. Then 'Uj said, "Now prepare my food, as you promised to feed me." Nūḥ ﷺ placed before him one plate of food and a load of bread. "Eat," he said to him. "What?" cried 'Uj, "is this all? A whole roasted ox does not satisfy me, and this is not enough to fill my hollow tooth!" "O yes," said Nūḥ ﷺ, "it is enough. Just begin your meal by pronouncing the words *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm.*" "O no, you won't get me to say that ever, you are trying to trick me into your religion." "What is it that you won't say?" asked Nūḥ ﷺ. "I will not say *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm,* that I will never say," yelled 'Uj. "You have just now said it, now you may begin your meal." The giant ate, and though it was just a little plate of food, he felt as if he had eaten a whole ox, and he could hardly finish what he had on his plate. He wiped his plate with bread and leaned back and belched, feeling very full.

At that moment Shayṭān came to him and whispered, "How could you have been filled up by such a little bit of food? It is impossible, Nūḥ ﷺ only worked some of his magic on you; in reality he fed you nothing at all ..." The giant believed not the evidence of his full, bloated belly, but in the words of Shayṭān, and he got angry. He picked up the load of wood he had brought to Nūḥ ﷺ, and yelled, "You promised to feed me, but you fell back on your word. So you shall also have no wood." With that he picked up the huge pile of wood, lifted it up in his arms and strode off again towards the mountains.

However, the splinters and shavings that fell from his arm-load as he stomped off were amply sufficient for building the Ark.

Jibrā'īl ﷺ the angel instructed Nūḥ ﷺ the prophet how to build the Ark, according to the Command of the Lord. Never

before had a ship been built in that waterless land, which did not join the sea or any big body of water. The angel instructed Nūḥ ﷺ how to piece together the hull of the ship out of 124,000 planks. On each of the planks was inscribed the name of one of the 124,000 prophets who were to appear from the beginning of creation to the end of times. On the last plank was written the name of our noble Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. In addition to these, four more boards were used to complete the construction, and upon these were written the names of the four rightly guided *khalīfas,* the successors, of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ: Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī. Two more pieces were placed on the roof of the Ark and these bore the names of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, the Prophet's grandsons. By the blessing contained in all these blessed names, Allah Almighty protected the Ark from sinking in the midst of the mighty deluge that was to come upon the world.

For us there is a lesson in this: Allah Almighty will protect all those in whose hearts there is love and respect for the prophets, particularly for the Prophet of the Last Times, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ and his family and companions, from the fires of hell on the Day of Judgment.

While Nūḥ ﷺ was busy building his Ark, the unbelievers scoffed at him and mocked him every day, and hindered him at his work. They went so far as to spread word that no one should dirty his own toilet from now on, but instead everybody should use the Ark as a place of convenience. People jumped to this mischievous idea and whoever could reach it, went and performed his daily need in the Ark of Nūḥ. At last it became nearly impossible for Nūḥ ﷺ to continue his work on the boat, on account of the filth and the stench that arose from this 'public toilet'. And Nūḥ ﷺ cried to the Lord about this new injustice, and the Lord addressed him, saying, "O My prophet Nūḥ, don't trouble yourself, for I will yet make them lick your boat clean of their own filth!" After this, Nūḥ ﷺ thanked the Lord for hearing his complaint and continued his work.

After some time, a strange disease began to spread among the people, a skin disease which covered them from head to foot

in a horrible rash or eczema. No part of their bodies remained that was not covered with hideous, suppurating sores, and they could find no remedy. Day by day it grew worse and spread, and people began to hide from each other because they were so disgusting to one another. Neither old nor young were exempted from the affliction, and even the pretty young girls hid themselves and felt ashamed of their own hideousness.

People only came out from their houses to go to Nūḥ's Ark in order to relieve themselves there. One day, one man, perhaps because he was in a hurry, happened to slip on the wet beams of the ship, for all was covered in filth and slime by now, and he tumbled head over heels into the putrid mess. When he had picked himself up and out of it, and washed himself off, he discovered to his great amazement that all the exposed parts of his body were free of the noxious sores! Having found the cure, he undressed and jumped in again, bathing himself from head to toe in the bath of excrement. And he found himself completely cleansed of the disease, not a trace remained. He rushed back to his people and showed himself to them, saying, "Run! I have found the cure. Run to the Ark that madman is building and bathe yourself in it, it is full up with this marvelous medicine!" Quickly they ran to the Ark, crushing each other in the rush to get there first, and they raced now to clean out the boat which they had previously competed in dirtying. The first-comers jumped in while the boat was still full, those who came after scooped it out with their hands and covered themselves with it, and the late-comers had to lick up their own excrement and spread it on themselves with their tongues.

In this way the Ark of Nūḥ عليه السلام was cleansed, as the Lord had promised him, and Nūḥ عليه السلام carried on with his work.

The ark was completed and the last planks set in their place on the first day of the month of Rajab, the sixth month of the lunar calendar. Its prow was shaped like the breastbone of a fowl and its stern like the tail of a peacock.

Now the Lord commanded Nūḥ عليه السلام to call all of his family together and the few believers among his people, to tell them to make ready to board the Ark, for the flood was about to set in.

"This will be its sign," said the Lord, "from the ovens in which you bake your bread water will gush forth. Then know that the time has come." Nūḥ's people prepared, and the unbelievers continued to scoff, "How should there be a flood in this country which hasn't even seen rain in so many years?"

Finally one day Nūḥ ﷺ saw the sign fulfilled that the Lord had given him, and he ordered everyone to board the Ark. It had three stories: into the lowest hold entered the animals in pairs, male and female; the second story was reserved for the human travellers, and apart from Nūḥ's family there were 80 of them, believing men and women; the third and top story was for the birds. When they had all entered, the doors were shut and they waited. Still the unbelievers mocked and scorned, and said, "What a foolish game he is at, how is this huge vessel ever going to float on dry land?" But, they had not long to wait for their answer, for before long water began to gush forth from the ground and rains poured down from the skies, and that which no one had believed came true.

Nūḥ ﷺ had gone aboard with his three sons and their families, but his fourth son, Ken'an was his name, or Yam, refused to board. His father called to him, "Come now, my son, it is time to save yourself, you will be drowned if you stay behind." He answered "Father, it is well-known that you are quite mad, everyone has said so for a long time, and nobody believes in you. In this country where there is not even a drop of water to spare, no rivers, lakes or streams — how should there suddenly be a flood? For years we have suffered from drought, and now you tell us this nonsense about a flood? How do you think your ship is going to float on dry land? You are just making a fool of yourself and of us!" "O my son," said Nūḥ ﷺ, "do you not see those black clouds full of rain?" "Oh, clouds," said Ken'an, "they come and it rains and they pass. If it really gets wet I will climb to the height of that hill and find shelter there."

Then the rains began to fall, as if the gates of heaven had sprung a leak: raindrops the size of mill-stones dropped from the skies and unbroken torrents of water bucketed down. The springs of the earth gushed forth and the alleys soon filled with

water. Soon the Ark was afloat, and those in the safety of the Ark cried for their families they had left behind. As it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*So it ran with them amid waves like mountains: and Nūḥ called to his son, who was standing apart, 'Embark with us, my son, and be thou not with the unbelievers!'*

He said, 'I will take refuge in a mountain, that shall defend me from the water.'

Said he, 'Today there is no defender from Allah's command but for him on whom He has mercy.'

And the waves came between them, and he was among the drowned." [Hūd, 11:42–43]

"*And Nūḥ called unto his Lord and said, 'O my Lord, my son is of my family, and Thy promise is surely the truth. Thou art the justest of those that judge.'*

Said He, 'Nūḥ, he is not of thy family; it is a deed not righteous. Do not ask of Me that whereof thou hast no knowledge I admonish thee, lest thou should be among the ignorant.'" [Hūd, 11:45–46]

When Nūḥ ﷺ ordered everyone aboard the Ark, he was told to instruct his people not to go aboard saying *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*, for to invoke the Names of Mercy is inappropriate at a time of Divine Wrath and Anger. They were ordered to board saying *bismi llāhi majrāhā wa mursāhā*, meaning, "*In Allah's Name shall be its course and its berthing*". [Hūd, 11:41]

Likewise, when we are about to slaughter an animal, we do not say, 'in the Name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate,' but only, 'in the Name of Allah,' *bismillāh, Allāhu akbar.*' The Names of Mercy are not invoked when blood is shed, be it slaughter or battle.

As they went aboard the Ark in pairs, Iblīs caught hold of the tail of the ass and pulled on it so that it could not advance. Nūḥ ﷺ did not see Iblīs, and was angered at what he thought was the stubbornness of the donkey, so he yelled at it, "In with you, damn you!" Unwittingly he had invited the accursed one into the Ark of safety. Later, when they were well afloat, Nūḥ ﷺ went down the hatch to look after the animals, and he found Iblīs there among them. "How did you make it in here, O accursed one?"

he asked. "O Nūḥ, you yourself invited me onto the boat, when you said, 'Get in, damned one!' For who else is damned but me? So I thought you must mean me and I hopped in ..."

One day, when Nūḥ ﷺ was strolling aboard the Ark, he met a very old person whom he had never seen before. He asked him, "Who are you that I don't know you, and how did you come aboard?" "I boarded this ship upon your orders, Captain Nūḥ," said the very old person, "and the reason for my being here is that their bodies might be with you, while their hearts might belong to me." Nūḥ ﷺ then realized that he was talking to Shayṭān. Iblīs went on to say, "O Nūḥ, your nation will be destroyed by five things. Three of these I will disclose to you, but the remaining two I will keep to myself." The Lord of the Worlds then inspired Nūḥ ﷺ to answer him, "Tell me only those last two, I do not need to know the other three." "That is all right by me," said the devil, "the first thing that will destroy them is envy, and the second is avarice. I grew envious of your grandfather Ādam, and on account of my envy all my thousands of years of worship were thrown in my face and the Lord cursed me. Envy was my undoing. But your father Ādam was destroyed by greed; for the Lord had forbidden him to approach a certain tree, and he went and ate from it in spite of his better knowledge. Ādam was destroyed by his greed. These two things, greed and envy, will destroy your nation as well."

Three kinds of animals came into existence aboard the Ark that had not been created before this time. This is how it happened:

All the animals were in the hold, and after the Ark had been afloat for a while, the stench of their droppings became bothersome to all the people who lived in the second story above them. They came to Nūḥ ﷺ and complained to him of this and said, "What shall we do?" The Lord then revealed to Nūḥ ﷺ to stroke the back of the elephant. Nūḥ ﷺ stroked his back and it tickled him so that he raised his trunk and sneezed. As he sneezed, the pig was born from his trunk. Thus the pig was created, and it began to eat up all the manure and droppings from the stable until it was cleaned up.

Shayṭān had seen what Nūḥ ﷺ had done to the elephant, and now he in turn stroked the back of the pig. It sneezed as well, and from its snout were born the rats. They swarmed over the ship and began to multiply very rapidly. They were always ravenously hungry and when they could find no more to eat, they began to gnaw holes into the planks of the ship. Again people complained to Nūḥ ﷺ that the rats would cause the Ark to sink, and the Lord this time revealed to him to stroke the back of the lion. And what came out of the sneeze of the lion? The cat. No sooner was the cat born than it went to chase after those rats and it kept the ship free of vermin. But the rats had already gnawed a hole into the hull and water was entering through it. Then the snake came forth and said, "I will do you a service, do not fear me," and it squeezed its tail into the hole, and it fitted so snugly that no more water could enter. There the snake remained for the rest of the journey. [from IBN 'ABBĀS]

At the outset of the journey it had been revealed to Nūḥ ﷺ that he must forbid all men and animals to have congress with their wives and mates, for this was not an activity to be indulged in while Divine Punishment descended upon the world. Also, space on the Ark was limited, so they should not multiply. Of all the people there, only Nūḥ's son Ham disobeyed, and his father prayed against him. For this reason Ham's face was blackened, and his descendants are the black races.

All the animals observed the prohibition, except for the dog. The cat saw him and told on him. Nūḥ ﷺ called the dog, but the dog denied his guilt and said, "The cat has lied." Again the dog was unable to control himself, and again the cat bore witness against him. This time it prayed, "If this happens again, let them be stuck together so that there will be evidence." The next time the dogs copulated, they stuck together and could not draw apart when the cat caught them. The cat went and fetched the prophet, and the dog was very much ashamed before Nūḥ ﷺ, but he was also very angry at the cat. Therefore, it prayed against the cat, and the Lord heard and answered its prayer, too: "O Lord," prayed the dog, "for that the cat has shamed me before Thy holy prophet, let it be that whenev-

er the cats engage in their generative activities, they will make such a noise and caterwauling that everyone will know what they are doing." And the dog's prayer also found acceptance, and so it is to this very day. This is the cause of the enmity between dogs and cats.

The Ark began its journey in the month of Rajab and it was seaborne for six months. When this time was completed, their provisions had also nearly been used up. Slowly, slowly the waters began to recede, as it is written:

"*And it was said, 'Earth, swallow thy waters, and heaven, abate!' And the waters subsided, the affair was accomplished, and the Ark settled on Al-Jūdī, and it was said, 'Away with the people of the evildoers!'*" [Hūd, 11:44]

All the people and animals aboard the vessel were slowly growing restive from being locked up in such a small space for so long, and they were hungry to see dry land. Nūḥ عليه السلام opened a small window in the Ark and saw that the rains had ceased, and that the waters were slowly subsiding. He called the crow and said to it, "Fly along, as far as you might, and see if you can spot dry land for us to disembark upon. Perhaps the peaks of the highest mountains are already clear." During the flood the water level had risen a full forty feet above the highest mountain peaks. So the crow flew away and it flew far and wide until it came to a mountaintop, and there it found the carcass of a drowned animal. Having come upon its favourite food, it alighted and began to hungrily feast on the meat, so that it forgot everything else. When the crow failed to return, Nūḥ عليه السلام ordered the dove to fly in search of dry land. It came to a place where it could make out an olive tree, but it was still mostly submerged. Only the smallest twigs were sticking out of the water. It rested on the twigs and tried to pick one for the prophet Nūḥ عليه السلام, but as it did so, it had to wade through the water and it covered its legs. The legs of the dove were then still covered in feathers, but wherever the Waters of Wrath touched it, all its feathers fell out. That is why its legs are red from that day on. It plucked a small olive branch and flew back to the Ark. Nūḥ عليه السلام blessed the dove for its service, and it became a tame and gentle

creature and a symbol of peace to all of mankind. Then he also cursed the crow, and as a result its feathers were blackened and its voice became unpleasant, and man does not love the crow.

Nūḥ sailed for six months and the Ark came to rest on the mountain of Al-Jūdī on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the lunar calendar. People began to emerge from the Ark, and since they had been locked up in the dim light of the boat for so long, their eyes were not accustomed to the bright light of day. They squinted and their eyes began to run, their eyelids sticking together with infection. It was then revealed to Nūḥ ﷺ to teach his people to annoint the eyes with *kuḥl,* collyrium and this complaint vanished.

To celebrate their safe return, they put together all the grains they had left in their bags and cooked a festival meal. On the tenth day of Muharram, the day of 'Ashūra, we commemorate the landing of the Ark by preparing a dish from various grains and beans, chickpeas etc, and this too is called Ashūra.

The first dwelling people founded after their landing they named Thamanin after the eighty believing men and women who had gone aboard the Ark with their prophet. In Arabic, this means eighty.

When the Ark first landed and Nūḥ ﷺ looked out through a window, he noticed that the earth's surface had turned all white. "How is it that the whole earth has turned white after the Flood, O Lord?" he asked. The Lord answered him and said, "Look closely, Nūḥ, and you will recognize that it is on account of the white bones of all the creatures that have perished as a result of your curse against them." Then Nūḥ ﷺ wept as he understood the greatness of the destruction.

Then the Lord commanded Nūḥ ﷺ, "Go to yonder mountain, dig some clay and make from it pots and pans and plates and vessels of every kind you can conceive of." Nūḥ ﷺ obeyed and worked at this task for a long time, until he had produced a mountain of earthenware vessels. He placed them to dry and harden in the sun. Then the Lord ordered him to pile them up neatly, the larger pots at the bottom of the pile, and the smallest ones on top. When he had done that, the Lord com-

manded Nūḥ ﷺ to pull out the vessel that formed the lowest corner of the pile, and when Nūḥ ﷺ did so, all the pots tumbled and rolled and broke into pieces. Nūḥ ﷺ sat among the pottery shards and was disconsolate at seeing all his effort having gone to waste, and he grumbled against the Lord, "Why did You have me build this huge pile if You were only intending for me to break it all to bits? Why did You make me take so much trouble over this work that has been all in vain?" The Lord then answered him, "I did this to show you, O Nūḥ, how it feels to a creator to destroy his own creation. You give so much value to these clay pots of your making, and they are only of mud, yet you cry for your wasted effort. Do you believe that I place no value in My servants whom I have created from nothingness? For so many days and years and generations I have tended and kept them, sustained and nourished them — then you prayed against them, and I accepted your prayer and cursed the whole world and destroyed all the living beings on it. O Nūḥ, do not pray against anyone ever again, for if you do so I will not only not heed your supplication, but I will erase your name from the book of the prophets!"

Never again was it given to any prophet to curse the whole world. After this Nūḥ ﷺ wept incessantly and never raised his head again until he died. Some say, that it was on account of these later lamentations that his name became Nūḥ.

Now, as everybody descended from the Ark, last of all to emerge were Nūḥ ﷺ, his sons, his unmarried daughter, the dog and the ass. Nūḥ ﷺ had promised this daughter to the first man who had asked for her hand in marriage. After him another had come, and Nūḥ ﷺ forgot that he had already promised her to the first man, and promised her to this second suitor as well. Eventually a third one came and asked for her hand as well, and Nūḥ ﷺ promised her to him as well. After the flood, when it was time for the marriage to be concluded, he learnt of his mistake, and grew confused — what should he do? He had only one daughter and she was now promised to three different men.

The angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to his aid, saying to him, "Your Lord Almighty sends you His *salāms* and advises you to take

your one daughter and put her in a room with your donkey and your dog. Then, by the Grace of the Almighty, you will see His power." Nūḥ ﷺ acted upon the angel's advice and shut the three into a room. When next he opened the door, what did he see? Three identical maidens, his own daughter three-fold! He married them in succession to the three men he had promised his daughter to, and they went off to their married homes. Some time after this Nūḥ ﷺ went to visit all three of his daughters, to see how they were getting on. The first one greeted him with respect and courtesy, served him some sweets and honoured him as her father and guest. Nūḥ ﷺ then knew that this was his own natural daughter. Next he went to the house of the second one, and he found there a woman who looked like his daughter, but who had no manners at all. She did not recognize him as her father and treated him roughly and would have kicked him, had he not quickly moved on. He understood that this one was the donkey. Last he went to the house of the third woman who looked like his daughter, and this one did not even know how to speak, whenever she opened her mouth it was to bark or snarl. Nūḥ ﷺ knew that this must be the dog-woman. But they all retained their human form and continued to live after the human fashion. This is why it is said that there are three kinds of women, some are like dogs, others like donkeys, and others like the daughters of Ḥawwā'.

Before the Flood, there lived a widow who was one of Nūḥ's most devoted followers. She believed in him firmly and her heart was true. She had one cow, and every day she would milk it, make yoghurt from the milk and bring it to the prophet. When Nūḥ ﷺ began to warn people of the deluge that was to come, she begged him many times not to forget her when the hour came. And he promised her not to forget.

When the time came and the rains of divine wrath poured forth from the gates of heaven, Nūḥ ﷺ forgot the poor widow and did not think of her until long after the Flood was over. After a long time had passed, he returned to his own village, and one day he saw the woman coming to his house with the milk pot in her hand. She said, "O prophet of Allah, have you

forgotten me?" Then Nūḥ's memory returned to him and he asked her with some consternation, "Where have you been all this time, woman? How did you survive that terrible flood that washed all life from the face of the earth?" The woman said, "What flood? I have seen no flood or anything like it since I saw you last. I am still waiting for your words to come true." After pondering for a bit, she added, "Or could it be that this was the event you were predicting: one day my cow came home with her legs covered in mud up to her knees, and I wondered at that. Could that have been your flood?" In this way Allah Almighty protects whom He wills from any disaster, and He has Power over all things.

As to the lifespan of Nūḥ ﷺ, there is a difference of opinion, but the Holy Qur'ān says:

"*Indeed, We sent Nūḥ to his people, and he tarried among them a thousand years, all but fifty.*" [The Spider, 29:14]

His age at the time he boarded the Ark was 480 years, though some sources maintain he was 600. After the Flood he lived another 306, or 250 years, and the number of his entire years was 950. He lived the longest of all the prophets who have ever appeared, and for that he is called the *shaykh al-anbiyā'*, the eldest of the prophets. When the Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ ascended to the heavens on his night-journey, all the prophets came to him to pay their respects, all but Nūḥ ﷺ. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was ordered to go to him on account of his venerable age. None of the eighty men and women who were saved from the flood had any children after that. Therefore all of mankind is descended from the three sons of Nūḥ, Sām, Ham and Yapheth. We are all related to our ancestor Nūḥ which is why he is also called, the second father of mankind. The sons of Sām settled in the lands of Yemen, Ḥijāz (Arabia) and India. The sons of Yapheth settled in Asia Minor, Turkistan and Persia, and Ham's sons settled in Egypt and Africa.

When Nūḥ ﷺ felt death approaching, he called one of his sons to his side and obliged him to be his successor after he had left the world. Then the Angel of Death came to Nūḥ ﷺ, and when Nūḥ beheld him, he began to cry loudly and lament.

"Why do you cry so loud," said the Angel of Death, "have you not lived in the world long enough?" Nūḥ ﷺ said, "This world resembles a house with two doors: through one of its doors we enter, and through the other we pass away."

When he had spoken these words, the angel took from him his soul and he died. Peace and blessings be upon Nūḥ ﷺ, and felicity in the world to come. SHAYKH MUḤAMMAD AL-MAGHRIBĪ has said: "None of the prophets' gravesites are known for certain except the graves of Ibrāhīm Khalīl (at Khalīl, that is Hebron), and the grave of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ at Medina." The grave of the prophet Nūḥ ﷺ is not known to us, but some say it is at Kūfa in 'Irāq. And Allah knows best.

But where is the Ark of Nūḥ ﷺ? People have often asked about it. It is reported to rest upon the mountain of Qāf and there it is preserved in its original shape. Suhayl ibn 'Abdallāh was sitting one day in seclusion, and while he was performing his recitations, he fell into an exalted state. He stretched out his foot and it reached to the mountain of Qāf, and later he reported that he had set foot onto the Ark. His companions were incredulous and said, "We might believe this if you had brought us a sign of it." At that very instant a sliver of wood came flying through the air out of nowhere, and by this they knew that Suhayl's report was truthful, and that indeed, the Ark of Nūḥ ﷺ rests upon the mountain of Qāf. It is hidden and can be seen only by those to whom Allah shows it.

May the Almighty increase us in Knowledge and Wisdom and grant us of His Light thereby to see.

12 — HŪD عليه السلام

HEN THE PROPHET NŪḤ عليه السلام felt his death approaching, he called his sons to his side. He sent them back to the land they had come from, along with all their sons and families, and they founded there the city known as Bābil, Babylon. His son Sām was sent into Arabia, the Najd and Yemen. When the Flood broke on the earth, the Heavenly House had been lifted up and taken away. Nūḥ عليه السلام now told his son Sām to find the spot where it had stood and to settle near there. So their tribe settled around the area of Mecca, and in time they became the tribes of Arabia and the Yemen.

700 or 800 years passed. For a long time the sons of Sām remembered the Flood and the great terror of it, and they held to the religion of Nūḥ عليه السلام and believed. But after some time, as it happens with the sons of Ādam, the story of the Flood became to them only a matter of hearsay, and thereafter a fable and a legend, nothing more than a tale of the ancients, which they gradually dismissed. So slowly they reverted to the worship of idols and their old ignorance.

Four tribes were living in the land of Najd. This has always been an extremely dry land, no rain ever fell there. While people increased food grew scarce. So they dispersed in little groups and settled in other lands; every group had their own chief, and each of these chiefs had his own special idol. The idols were called after the leader they belonged to, one was called ʿĀd, and the other Thamūd. There were among them a special class of priests and soothsayers who used to interpret the 'speech' of the idols, they would hide behind or inside the figures and produce sounds and hollow voices which they convinced the people were the voices of their gods. The youngest priest among the people of ʿĀd was a young man called Shamrūkh, and being

the youngest, he was obliged by custom to keep silent and to learn by listening to the older priests, but his heart was even more possessed than the hearts of all the others. Secretly he was plotting and planning to usurp power from their hands, and from his early youth he dreamt of nothing but power and kingship.

The people of 'Ād were a race of giants and because of their greater physical strength they used to bully everybody else. Every year they held a fair on their lands, to which people came from far and wide for trading, games and entertainment, and the fair lasted for four days. Formerly people had looked forward to the enjoyment but since the people of 'Ād became ever more violent and disagreeable, it was no more fun for the tribes. When they were bargaining for some goods, the 'Ād would threaten them, "If you do not buy it for the price we ask, we will kill you." So people stopped coming to the fair, and their business slowed down and came to a halt. A year or two passed, each year worse than the one foregone. Finally they decided to launch raids against the neighbouring tribes who had fled from them and no longer came to their fair. They fell upon them and took away all their belongings and led their wives and children off into slavery. Then they would pack up and leave the country in search of fatter pastures. They had heard of a land of plenty and planned to take possession of it by force.

Now Shamrūkh, the young priest, saw his chance come at last. One day he knocked upon the king's door. The king, was sitting with his son, passing the time of day. Shamrūkh came in and fell upon his face, prostrated before the king and made him all manner of obeisance. He pretended to be worshipping him and at last he spoke, haltingly, as if from great reverence. "O our god-king" he said, "Oh sublime divinity, your humble servant had seen a dream last night, oh, such a dream — but I cannot tell ..." "What did you see in that dream?" asked the king, bewildered. "I saw all the world fall down before you and kissing your feet. I saw you had become the greatest lord of all, the great god himself." The king had never before been flattered in such terms, and he was puzzled. "Then," continued

the false dreamer, "I saw you step out onto the hill of the idols, and, imagine, I saw you smash them all to pieces. After that you stepped out in front of the assembled people and said to them, 'We have made these idols with our own hands, how should there be any harm in unmaking them again? In my hands is the power to hurt and to harm, so fear me, O people, for I am your Lord.' When you had spoken those words, I saw a great light rising from behind the mountains, and you appeared in the middle of that light, surrounded as if by your own rays. All your servants fell down before you and great was the awe of that moment. Then you began to increase in size, you grew and grew until you filled the whole world. It is yours, O king, for you are its creator and sustainer."

His words were calculated and full of lying deceit. The king marvelled at all he said and could not quite believe it at first. "Am I then really so great and important?" "O lord," said the liar, "it was you who showed us that dream ... It was you who has made me the witness of your glory so that I might tell it abroad. I know that you have hidden your true station from us up till now, but the time is nigh for you to shine forth."

Now the king knew full well that he was only a mortal and no god, but the priest Shamrūkh talked for so long and with, so much persuasiveness that he began to doubt himself. "If I am that god that you say I am, what do you think I should do now?" he asked. "Give me permission, and I will arrange everything," said Shamrūkh. "What will you do?" "We must first of all explain to the other priests what has happened, and certainly they will give us their support, for after all, you are powerful over all things ..." The king agreed and sent Shamrūkh off to talk to the priests. But what he said to them was this:

"O my brothers, flee for your lives, for the king 'Ād plans to have us all killed!" "How did you come to hear of this?" they asked. "Just now I have come from his tent and I got away by the skin of my teeth. If we do not flee at once, he will have us all killed." "How and where shall we flee to?" they asked despairingly. He answered, "We will flee and carry the idols with us. And when we are gone some way, we will chop them to bits and

throw them by the roadside." "But what will all our people and worshippers think?" asked the priests. "They will think it was ʿĀd, the king who did it. Furthermore, I know of a place where there is a cave in which we can hide. After they have stopped searching for us, we will go and live among another tribe, and we can serve them with our knowledge, and our lives will be easy once again." They said, "All right, when do we leave?" "At midnight," he told them.

They went to the idols and chopped them up into little pieces, then they placed the pieces into a bag. Meanwhile, Shamrūkh was collecting a big pile of brush and firewood behind the hill. Nobody took any notice of him or of what he was doing because they were in such a frenzy to get their own things packed and ready. At midnight they set out, and they did not bother to check whether Shamrūkh was with them or not. They set out and dumped their idols by the roadside. They rushed along until they had reached the cave Shamrūkh had described to them and where they fancied themselves to be safe.

But Shamrūkh had not gone out with them. Instead he returned to the king and said to him, "O most farsighted king, the dream you inspired in me has come true already. All the priests have fled and they have broken their own idols to pieces. Now the time has come for you to show yourself for what you really are, this very night let the people bear witness to your true majesty and divinity. They will all become slaves unto you and will not act against you, whatever you may do to them.

Next he went and called to the people that their priests had realised the falsehood they were worshipping and had broken their idols, and themselves had fled into the hills. He called them to come to a meeting place in the middle of the night, where their new god would show himself to them, and for everyone to appear there without fail. At midnight, when they were all assembled, Shamrūkh lit the gigantic pile of grass and brushwood that he had collected earlier behind the hill. The king ʿĀd stood on top of the hill, and all the sky behind him was illuminated by the great fire, so that the king appeared himself to be shining. People were dazzled for they could not see the fire, they only

saw its light, and in the midst of the light the figure up on the temple mount which spoke to them now in a great voice: "O my people, my servants, I am your own true god, and I have come to you at last and put an end to all the false gods you were worshipping. I have been victorious over them and their priests. Me alone shall you obey, me alone shall you worship from this time on." And he said all that Shamrūkh had taught him to say.

People gave not much thought to what he had said, in fact they agreed and said, "Truly, if those idols had had any power of their own, they would have known how to help themselves out of their plight. As it is, they just let themselves be chopped to pieces." Then they wanted to know where the priests had gone who had led them astray for so long, for they now wished to take their revenge. The king asked Shamrūkh where they were, and he whispered it to him; then the king informed his people, as if he had just had news from the unseen. People set out and followed the signs he had described to them and before long they found them huddled in their cave. They grabbed them and beat them and dragged them before the king who said, "Ah, the guilty ones! They will be our first sacrifice, we will slaughter them and then we shall ceremonially eat their flesh." He gave orders, and they slaughtered the unfortunate soothsayers in front of the king. Then they skinned and cooked them according to their barbarous custom, and ate them up.

The only one left of the soothsayers was the evil Shamrūkh whose soul was sold on power. The king did everything he advised him to do. He made a great show of his humility before the great god-king, but in truth it was he, Shamrūkh, who determined all matters, and fed his decisions to the king unawares. Each time he came before the king, he would bow low and rub his face in the dust, and approach the palace crawling on his hands and knees. Deeply hidden in his heart was his ambition to become the king of them all, but no one knew this.

One day he came before the king ʿĀd and said to him, "O lord, we must build a new temple for you on the mount, so that your greatness will be known to the land when we are gone. For we ought to leave this place also and go in search of better,

richer land." The king was happy with this plan and placed all his people under the command of Shamrūkh, so that the building could be achieved. He called before him all his viziers and advisors, and announced to them that he wanted a special temple built for himself on the hill of his first divine manifestation, and that he needed the work to be completed within a fortnight. His advisors voiced their doubts that such a great building could be accomplished within such a short time, for it meant hard work, splitting rocks and felling trees. Also, the design the king had put before them required steps and doors on all four sides of the temple, so they said, "O king, how are we to accomplish this task, there is not enough manpower, all the tribes that used to do our work for us have run away and fled." Shamrūkh then spoke up and said, "Let the gentlemen advisors work alongside the slaves, the architects shall work together with the bricklayers, then all will come into its place on time." By this time people were angered against Shamrūkh, and there were some among them who would have been pleased to get rid of him, but others warned against an attack, saying, "He is the favourite of our king, and if you kill him, surely he will leave no one alive."

So they set to work and worked as hard and as best they could. The building they erected was open from four sides and steps led up to each door. Each flight of stairs had 80 steps. From the top you could see far over the land, and nobody could come or go without being spied out from that lofty building on the hill. On the fourteenth day they had prepared for the king a travelling litter, a throne which would bear him during their intended migration. Shamrūkh asked the king's permission to paint and decorate it himself. "I will paint upon it what you have taught me through inspiration." By this time the king had actually begun to believe in his own divinity and that it was he who inspired Shamrūkh to paint his throne, and not Shamrūkh who ordered him around, and he said to himself, "Well, let's see what it looks like."

All night long Shamrūkh worked on the throne, he painted upon it frightful images in many bright and gaudy colours, and

to look upon it was enough to send shivers down your spine. He worked at this ghoulish thing until morning dawned, the morning of the fifteenth day when the work was to be completed. The king came to look at the painting and himself took fright and asked, "What is that?" "It is just what you yourself have inspired in me, O greatest of all gods. No one can look at your travelling litter without his heart quailing within his breast. Even from a distance everyone will be impressed."

So the king was mounted in his litter which was pulled along by many horses and camels, and in his hand he held a golden scepter. They set out towards the temple, and from time to time along the way, Shamrūkh directed the king to utter a sound like "Ahh!" and to strike the ground with his golden scepter. Then all the people would fall down on the ground before him. The king was seated and Shamrūkh was standing behind him, giving him the signals for each act. He made them fall down every few steps, and his pride grew within him and coupled with his lust for power, and he thought to himself, "They are not only prostrating before ʿĀd, the king, they are prostrating before me as well, and I am in a higher position than he ..."

The procession advanced slowly until it had reached the temple site. The king looked at the strange building and voiced surprise. "But my Lord, it was you yourself who instructed me to build this temple for you, and it is much better than the temple of the old idols. See here, it has openings on all four sides, and steps leading up to each of them. What is the reason for that? Each of these windows has a special name, and at whichever window you choose to appear will signify to the people which of your divine properties you care to dispense that day. One side is called 'Victory'; if you choose to show yourself on that side, you will be victorious and triumphant over everyone. Its colour is black. Another side is called 'Satisfaction'; if you show yourself there it will mean to the people that you are satisfied with yourself and that your people are satisfied with you. Its colour is yellow. If you come out on the porch of 'Provision,' it means that you are feeling generous and will grant them plenty of provisions and that you will send them rain. Therefore, its

colour is green. The fourth side is the side of 'Peace,' and it is of red colour. If you show yourself there it means that you guarantee safety to your people."

The king listened to all Shamrūkh had said, and when he had understood he said, "Good, let me ascend then on the side of the gate of Peace and Safety. For we are about to set out on a long journey and we will be passing through a vast and waterless desert, so we will need the protection of safety." He ascended to the highest place, and all the people cheered him and fell down before the steps. Then they brought human sacrifices as was their heinous custom, and the feasting continued for four whole days.

When they had made ready to travel and every one was packing, the king asked Shamrūkh, "What will become of this marvelous temple and all its many steps?" "We will take them with us," said Shamrūkh. He ordered for small images to be made representing the steps of the four colours, and an effigy of the king was attached to the top of each. "But I thought that you said that the idols have no real powers?" asked the king. "Ah, but this is different, my lord, for these are your own images, and they take their power from you who are god. These figures will represent whichever one of the divine moods you wish to show." The king consented although he did not understand.

They set out into the desert, and the first days they had plenty to eat and drink, and they also had no fear of the vast desert, for they believed that by the power of the four idols they would be pulled out of the burning sands, so they took no precautions and continued in their usual depraved demeanour. But the desert was vast and after some time they lost their way. Then they began to be frightened and wondered if they might die of thirst after all, for there was no sign of relief coming from any direction. They went to their king to plead with him for help, but Sharmrukh made the king tell them that he was testing them to see who was his most faithful follower. Whoever lived might live, and whoever died, let him die.

But the king himself was fearful and intimidated by the desert, though he told no one, not even Shamrūkh, for he was

afraid to lower himself in his eyes. Even Shamrūkh was ill at ease, for he knew he was responsible for all this, he had driven them into the desert and led them into these fearsome wastes. One day he rose before any of the others had awoken, and he saw birds circling in the sky over a certain place; from that sign he knew that they were saved and that there was water nearby. He came back to the camp, but he told no one that he had been away. He pretended to have just woken up, and he went to the king to bid him good morning. ʿĀd said, "What shall we do? There is no sign of water, no cloud, no sign of rain — today we shall certainly die of thirst!" "Be unperturbed," said Shamrūkh, "for you have invested the idols with special powers today. This morning they told me where to go to find water, and they also informed me of many things that are to happen there."

He made the king gather all the people before him and address them, "O my people! I, your king, your god, am very pleased with you — I am releasing you now from this trial which you have patiently borne." And he directed them in the direction Shamrūkh had pointed out to him. They reached the top of a mountain, and when they peered over its crest, they beheld on the other side a marvelous green and fertile land dotted with flocks and watered by running brooks. They rejoiced and fell down in prostrations of thanks before their king and before the idols for having brought them out of the fierce desert into safety. Then they rested there a little while, lying hidden behind the crest of the mountain, so they could not be spotted by the inhabitants of that land. For they harboured no good intention towards those peaceful people. They remained in hiding for a day or two until they had fully revived and recovered their strength. Then they climbed over the crest of the mountain and fell upon the peaceful land, a savage horde, and merciless. They spoiled and pillaged the country, ravaged and ransacked all they found. They killed and plundered, raped and burned. Shamrūkh stayed behind to consult the idols, and he then told them that the idol of victory had spoken, and it had said they should leave no one alive who might go out and tell other people about their surprise attack and their forceful intrusion. So

they killed every living being they found, and they spared neither young nor old, they massacred the whole population, and also ate their flesh.

Despite the fury of the attack, one man managed to get away and fled up into the mountains. Just when he thought he had made his escape, he was spotted and apprehended by Shamrūkh who lay in wait up there. The man begged for his life and said, "I beg you not to kill me, I am the only survivor of my people, have mercy, if only once ..." Shamrūkh suddenly had an idea and said, "All right, I will not kill you just now, but you shall not see the light of day." "How is that?" said the poor man, "what are you about to do to me?" "See, I will place you in this cave, and whenever I ask of you any question, you shall answer me. If you do that, I will not kill you." The man entered within the cave, and Shamrūkh walled up the mouth of the cave, leaving a little opening to hand in some food and drink. Then he began to ask the man in the cave questions, many questions and the man answered him truthfully. He asked who had ruled the land, what were the names of their kings, of their idols; what were their main crops, and what were their customs? And the sole survivor of that people spoke and told him everything he wanted to know.

When 'Ād returned from the raid, Shamrūkh told him that the idol Victory had spoken and informed him of all things he needed to know. He had told him where the people kept their gold and their treasures hidden, and all they would have to do is look in those places. The king sent his people out to look, and they found everything at exactly those spots. And with every golden ring they found their faith in the god-king grew, and their conviction became firm. They wanted to bring the idols down below into the valley so that they could worship them properly, but Sharnrukh prevented this, saying, "The idols have told me that they are happy up here, because they can oversee the whole land from here. I will stay here with them; go and take your place down below."

And so he learned from the 'oracle' that there lived another tribe in the surrounding regions which was even richer and

better off than the one they had just destroyed. He told the king what the 'idol' had told him, and advised the king to go by night and come upon them unawares while they were all asleep. So they fell upon the tribes of the surrounding regions and they subjected them all to their rule. They enslaved their women and children, and made them do all their work for them, so that the people of 'Ād did nothing but follow their perverse pleasures and unlawful lusts.

However, little by little discord grew among them, for there were some who feared that the sorcerers and soothsayers, Shamrūkh at their head, were becoming too proud and mighty, and might attempt to usurp power from the king and place themselves on the throne of kingship and divinity. The king's son led the opposition party and under his lead they plotted to rid themselves of the sorcerers. This was not easy for the sorcerers had ways and means of knowing what they planned, for they employed dark powers, and they had spies everywhere. They knew that the king's son Tanūh was at the head of the opposition and that he was trying to persuade his father 'Ād to have them removed. But 'Ād was unwilling at first, and said to his son, "It was our good friend Shamrūkh who brought us to power and who led us into this easy life that we now lead. We must try them first to see if what you suspect is true." They tried them, but the sorcerers and soothsayers were wily and prepared and pretended their utmost loyalty to the king, so that he took no steps against them. Tanūh then devised a plan to set up the sorcerers against the soothsayers, trying to stir up conflict in their own ranks. But this also did not succeed, and the hold of the priesthood over the people grew, for they appeared to be more knowledgeable and fit to rule. Finally one night, Allah Almighty decided the matter. There was a great earthquake which shook the mountain, but the wondrous thing was that only the temples and caves of the sorcerers and soothsayers were destroyed, nobody else was harmed at all.

Some time after this the king 'Ād died and Tanūh, his son, took his place as god-king. Under his rule conditions in the land deteriorated even further, no caravan passed through their bor-

ders in safety, and fear of the giant tribe of 'Ād spread far and wide, their territory becoming known as the 'Valley of Hell'. Still people were forced to do business with them, for most trade was in their hands and they had great material power.

Now the king Tanūh had two sons, Shaddād and 'Abdullāh. Shaddād was like his father, an oppressor and a tyrant, while his brother 'Abdullāh was gentle and mild by nature, knew the meaning of mercy and charity and tried to alleviate the lot of the slaves and oppressed. But after the death of his father, Shaddād was made king of the tribe. Shaddād had many sons, while 'Abdullāh had only one son, and his name was Hūd. Hūd resembled his father in that he was clement and for-bearing, and this is the meaning of his name.

Hūd was destined to be the prophet of this nation. His cousin, the king Shaddād, had by now passed a royal decree that forbade any member of the tribe of 'Ād to perform any kind of labour, and every task had to be carried out by slaves. They even let themselves be dressed and fed by their slaves. It was forbidden to do anything under threat of capital punishment, for they fancied themselves gods and sons of gods. Gradually they grew bored and did not know what to do with themselves anymore.

One day, out of sheer boredom, one young man ventured out into the wilderness, and as he sat by the banks of the stream, he noticed something shiny in the water. He scooped it up and found it very pretty and attractive and fished for more. Eventually he went upstream until he came to the mountains, and there he found embedded in the rocks whole veins of this yellow metal which was gold. He became fascinated by this shiny substance and busied himself with it, while no one knew what he was doing. In time he learnt to extract it from the rock, and to work the metal. He set up a workshop in one cave, and he began to fashion idols of gold, and thrones to set them upon. He filled up a whole cave of golden statues, and it was a dazzling sight to come upon.

One day the king Shaddād who was his relative, asked him what it was that drew him apart from the other youths who spent their time partying with girls and such entertainments.

He said, "O king, I have found something better than that, come with me and I will show you." So he led the king to his cave and the king was so impressed with the golden idols that he fell down before them and worshipped them, even though he himself was supposed to be a god. He said, "We must bring sacrifice to these gods, let us slaughter some of our slaves." The young man said, "No, we will need our slaves to do this work for us, to mine the gold and extract the metal from the rock, let us bring sacrifices from a foreign tribe." They began to dig gold in great quantities, until they had equipped all their households with ornaments of gold, all their plates and cups and spoons and vessels were of gold. They all wore ornaments and chains and pendants made of pure gold and they waxed ever more haughty and proud.

Hūd grew up among them, and when he was twenty-five years old he lost his parents. He never found pleasure in the idle pastimes of his people and his heart shrank from the injustice and oppression he observed all around him. When he was forty years old he wandered off and went into seclusion, staying by himself in the dense forests, and pondering on how to change conditions or at the very least to keep himself out of harm's way. He came into a cave and suddenly he perceived a light in the cave, though there was no opening to let in the sunlight. He looked about, and as he stood in wonderment, he heard a voice coming from nowhere, and the voice said, "You have been made a prophet by your Lord Almighty Allah." Hūd ﷺ was the first prophet to be sent after the Flood of Nūḥ; in the 800 years that had elapsed since that time, all memory of the true religion and the way of the prophets had faded and none of the people of his time knew Allah. The angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to Hūd ﷺ and taught him, revealed to him the Divine Truth and told him he had been sent to his people to call them to Allah. But he also warned Hūd ﷺ that he must not yield to his people's demand for a miracle for that miracle would become the grounds for their destruction. Hūd ﷺ first turned to instruct his own family, but they thought him quite mad and could not understand a word of what he was telling them.

Hūd ﷺ had one friend and close companion. One day this friend went out into the wilderness and Hūd ﷺ followed him secretly. When he had come to a cave, he fell down and began to pray for guidance to the Lord of the Worlds. "O Lord," he cried, "O Creator of the heavens and the earth, I am in need of knowledge and guidance. If You do not send me one of Your servants to teach me, I will surely lose my way." Thus he prayed with sincerity of heart. Hūd ﷺ came up behind him and said, "Good tidings to you, O my friend!" The friend was startled for he had thought he was alone in the cave, but Hūd ﷺ reassured him and said, "Your Lord has answered your prayer, and has sent me to be your prophet and your guide on the way of truth." His friend was grateful and his heart was glad, and together they set out to teach their people.

The plight of the slaves of 'Ād was harsh indeed, for they were made to live under intolerable conditions. They were given insufficient food, and if any of them reached for a morsel of food without permission, he would be put to death. They were beaten severely and made to work very hard in the gold mines; they were also made to dive for pearls in the sea. Hūd's first following was among the slaves, for they liked listening to him, as he gave them hope and taught them patience. Word came to his uncle's son Shaddād that Hūd ﷺ had begun to keep company with the slaves, and he called him to question him about this. "Do you want to live among the slaves and toil like them?" he said. "No," said Hūd ﷺ, "but make me their chief overseer, and I will have something to do." "All right," said the king, "since you can find no other pastime, you shall be the overseer of the slaves."

Hūd ﷺ became their overseer and their lot improved, for he did not beat them, but treated them kindly, and he taught them the word of Allah. They began to work harder than before, they produced more gold and more pearls, and there were more than 1000 secret Muslims among them. Hūd ﷺ began to live with them in their caves, he slept on the bare ground as they did, and the only thing that distinguished him was that he was not in chains. The king's people found out about this and came

early one morning to see whether this was true. They were angry at Hūd ﷺ for abasing himself, for was he not the son of a king and a god? Then they brought one slave of whom Hūd ﷺ was very fond, and they gave Hūd ﷺ a whip, and ordered him to whip that slave for some alleged disobedience. Hūd ﷺ refused. His people grew annoyed with him and said, "Either you whip him, or we whip you to death, even if you are the son of god." The slave then implored Hūd ﷺ to whip him, and unwillingly Hūd ﷺ took the whip, but however many stripes he gave him, the slave did not cry out, nor was there any sign of hurt or any wound on his back. Hūd's people marvelled at this, and said, "Who are you, Hūd, that you can perform such a miracle? This slave should have been dead by now." Hūd ﷺ then said to them, "Know then, that I am Allah's prophet, and there is no god but He. *Lā ilāha illā llāh, Hūd rasūlullāh.*" "What!" they cried, "what sort of nonsense is this? If we did not know that you were the son of 'Ād, our god and king, we would put you to death on the spot."

But they did not dare, for they had witnessed the miracle with the whip, besides they considered him a harmless madman, so they left him in peace for a while. Hūd ﷺ continued his preaching and instructed his followers about life and death and life after death, punishment and reward. And he described to them the pleasures of paradise gardens, as his Lord had revealed to him, its beauties and delights.

Shaddād heard about this paradise, its golden walls its streams of wine and honey, its beautiful youths and maidens and he said one day, "Paradise? I will make it for my subjects, I am god and I will grant them paradise in this life already, before they die. Why wait?" And he gave orders for the 'Gardens of Iram' to be built, as it is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Hast thou not seen how thy Lord did with 'Ād, Iram of the pillars, the like of which was never created in the land ...*" [The Daybreak, 89:6–8]

For more than twenty years he worked to create that paradise on earth. All their gold and their silver went into it, he robbed all their subjected territories of their valuables, every

stone, every precious thing went into the construction of this earthly paradise. It contained every fruit and tree that could be found, and sweet smelling streams were made to flow through it. Every imaginable delight was implanted into this precious garden. He had chosen a place which is called Wadi Ahqaf, for it had the most delightful clime. In brief, his garden really resembled a paradise.

News of his creation spread far and wide, and it came at last to a tribe related to the sons of 'Ād, who were called the Amālik. Their king was one Mu'āwiya ibn Bikr. These people had settled near Mecca (which was holy ground, though the Ka'ba had not yet been erected in place of the Heavenly House that had been lifted to the heavens during the Flood), and they had become very rich through trade. As a result, they were very proud and looked down on everybody. They set out to view the fabled garden of Shaddād, and approached in a splendidly decked-out caravan, adorned in their best robes and all their rich attire, each one looking like a king. Their relatives had news of their coming and rode out to meet them, but when they saw them from afar, sparkling in the sunlight from all their golden ornaments, Shaddād said, "I cannot meet them like this, I must first get dressed. Make an excuse for me." His attendants met the Amālik and said that Shaddād begged to be excused, his son had just fallen ill, hence he was prevented from meeting them, though he would have liked to. Shaddād had also given orders to lead them on roundabout ways to the palace, to give himself time to prepare for their arrival.

Hūd ﷺ also heard of their arrival and thought, "These people have settled near the holy precincts, maybe they are better than our folk here, and have some piety and fear of Allah. I will go out to meet them." So he went out to receive them and said to their leader, "O leader of your people, greetings to you who come from the holy lands. Here lives a people of sinful transgressors, and I have come to meet you because their king, Shaddād, turned back since he was ashamed of his poor clothes. I am the prophet of the only One worthy of worship, Allah Almighty, and I call you to join my way and not to follow

falsehood." "Who is this?" enquired the proud people of Mecca. "Oh, he is just a madman," said some of Shaddād's retainers "What is the meaning of this, that you send out a madman to meet us and to welcome us to your realm?" They apologized and led them to the palace of Shaddād who had meanwhile dressed himself and prepared for their arrival. And the Amālik were idol worshippers and fancied themselves gods like himself.

Hūd ﷺ was disappointed. But the number of his followers grew, and his wife and his family also became Muslim. They were constantly being ridiculed and mocked by the unbelievers, but they wrapped themselves in the patience their faith gave to their hearts.

Shaddād meanwhile received his guests and treated them to the best his kingdom could provide, and after a few days of feasting he took them to see his famed gardens. They inspected the well-watered place and all its wonders, and they were amazed by it, and the abundance of water, for their country was an exceedingly dry place. They asked, "Does it not ever dry out here? Do you always have rain? Will not all these plants wither and die?" "No," answered Shaddād proudly, "we always have rain and running water, and our fruits never give out." Mu'āwiya said, "In our country it is different, we often have droughts, and the land dries up, and for long periods there is no rain. Then we go up the mountain and pray to our idols to send us rain, and they hear us and send us what we have prayed for, and save our crops and flocks."

Hearing this, Shaddād laughed at them, for he suddenly felt himself to be superior, and he said, "What, you abase yourselves so that you pray to your idols whom you have fashioned with your own hands? Why, if you are gods, why do you not just order the rains to come?" "And the rain obeys you?" asked Mu'āwiya: "Yes, of course, I can have as much rain as I like," boasted Shaddād. So they left, feeling somewhat humbled.

But Allah Almighty intended to teach Shaddād a lesson. The rains that year did not come, nor the year after or the year after that. People grew hungry and restless. Hūd ﷺ said to them, "Say: *lā ilāha illā llāh, Hūd rasūlullāh*, and you will live in

this world and in the next in paradise." They answered, "We have made a paradise for ourselves," for the gardens of Shaddād were almost completed, and they were getting ready to move into them. But the drought continued, and their crops withered, their flocks died, and the sheep and domestic animals did not give birth, nor did the women bear any children. They came to Shaddād and complained to him, and implored him to lift these conditions from them. For seven years the drought continued and their life became desperate.

Neither Shaddād nor their idols would help them. Hūd ﷺ continued to call them to Islam, but they scoffed and laughed. They could see that the Muslims were faring better than they were, for with the little that they had, they made do and thanked the Lord for it, and the Lord made them satisfied with it. They even had enough to give to others more needy than themselves, while none of the unbelievers had anything to spare, and none would have given a morsel even to his own mother.

At last it came to Shaddād's mind to try praying for rain. So he made a ceremony and entreated the golden idols, with no results. Then, as a last resort, he remembered his relative Mu'āwiya whom he had laughed at when he told him that they took their idols up a certain hill, prayed a rain prayer there, and without fail, the rains would fall. So he decided to swallow his pride and to try this. So he sent envoys to Mecca, to the hill Mu'āwiya had spoken of, — perhaps this was the mountain of 'Arafat. — Mu'āwiya was not there of the time, but the tribes around were living a good life, lacking nothing, and so the envoys remained there for a month. Shaddād's people were impatiently awaiting their return, for they should have been back after 20 days. When they did not come, they sent out other envoys after them. These also did not return. However many envoys they sent, none of them came back, for as soon as their immediate hunger and thirst were appeased, they forgot about the needs of their tribesmen.

Finally Mu'āwiya returned to his city. He could not openly ask Shaddād's people while they were there enjoying his hospitality, for they were his relatives and would have taken it as

an insult. So a few months went by. Finally Mu'āwiya thought of a way he could reveal his thoughts to his relatives without offending them. He had a slave-girl who was trained in singing and playing the lute, and he had her sing a song to them, a poem in which they were reminded of the reason they had come, and which reproached them for their forgetfulness and lack of conscience. When they heard her song, they suddenly remembered. "That's right," they said, "we came here to pray for rain. Our people back home are waiting for us."

Now among them there was one who was Muslim and who believed in Hūd عليه السلام. They climbed up the hill, and the Muslim prayed to Allah Almighty, "O Lord, answer our prayers." The others took their idols up onto the hill and prayed to them. After a while, three clouds appeared overhead. They each had a different colour: the first was white, the second red, the third was black. The clouds spoke, but only the Muslim could hear them. The first said, "Choose me. If you choose me, I will rain upon you snakes and scorpions." The second cloud spoke, "Choose me, I am full of fire." And the third cloud spoke, "Choose me, I will bring you a scorching wind." The idolaters looked at the clouds and thought, "If it is a black cloud, that means it is full of rain. We will choose that one." The cloud followed them overhead all the way back to Wadi Ahqaf.

The angel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام came to Hūd عليه السلام and warned him that the Wrath of Allah was upon them. Hūd عليه السلام prayed to the Lord to grant them a respite yet, perhaps they would still listen and repent, and the Lord granted Hūd's prayers and deferred the punishment a little while longer. And Hūd عليه السلام called Shaddād one last time to turn towards the Lord, the Creator of all Life, and to ask of Him alone to send a merciful rain, but Shaddād climbed up to an elevated place and gazed in the direction of Mecca from where he saw the cloud approaching. He saw it was a black cloud and he said, "There comes the rain!"

Then the angel ordered Hūd عليه السلام to gather about him all the faithful and to stay in a place which he showed them. Shaddād sent word to Hūd عليه السلام that he had seen a cloud and that there would be rain shortly, and he called on them to worship him.

Hūd ﷺ replied, "What you have seen, O Shaddād, is the cloud, which will bring you destruction. It carries a scorching wind, and none of you will escape it, for it is the Wrath of Allah." But his warnings were all in vain.

So the cloud came upon them, and for seven nights and eight days they were chastised, until not one of them remained alive. A scorching wind from hell attacked them and burnt their faces, and tore them to pieces, and from the cloud came beings that looked like great birds with wings and claws which picked people up and bore them into the air, then dashed them down upon the ground.These were no birds, they were avenging angels.

"And as for 'Ād, they were destroyed by a wind, clamorous, violent that He compelled against them seven nights and eight days, uninterruptedly, and thou mightest see the people laid prostrate in it as if they were the stumps of fallen down palm-trees. Now dost thou see any remnant of them?" [The Indubitable, 69:6–8]

Shaddād had hidden himself in a cave and blocked the entrance with stones. In this way he hoped to escape the punishment. But every day he lost one of his closest companions and his sons. The wind covered everything with a burning hot dust, like ashes. At last only Shaddād was left. Hūd ﷺ said to him, "O son of 'Ād, you have seen it now with your very own eyes, will you not believe?" Shaddād replied, "Are those the armies of your god?" "Yes", said Hūd, ﷺ "those are His armies; and this is what I have warned you of. You should have believed me and not courted destruction." Up until the very end Shaddād did not believe in the Power of Allah, and at last the wind picked him up, too, and hurled him against the cliffs and boulders, until he lay smashed up on the ground. As for the believers who were with Hūd ﷺ, the wind of punishment did not touch them, they sat and watched the destruction until it was done. Not a trace remained of the fine houses and the beautiful gardens, all was laid to waste and it was a desolate sight to behold.

After the Wind of Divine Wrath had come and gone, Hūd ﷺ said to his followers, "We must leave this place, for it is cursed by the Wrath of Allah. We cannot live here any longer." From

the heat of the scorching winds, the slaves' chains had melted away and fallen off their hands and feet. So they migrated until they came to the region around the Ka'ba. There Hūd ﷺ settled and lived until he was 150 years of age. When he died he was buried near the *maqām* Ibrāhīm, but his grave, as the graves of most of the prophets, is not known for certain.

Peace and blessings be upon Hūd ﷺ and upon all the prophets, Amīn.

One companion of each of the prophets who came after that time had the good fortune to be shown the Gardens of Iram. In the time of our noble Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, one companion by the name of 'Abdullāḥ was travelling with a caravan in those parts, and he lost his way. Suddenly he found himself in front of a luscious garden with flowing streams and all manners of fruits bending the boughs of the trees. He wondered very much at this, entered it and picked a few of the fruits but he never saw a living soul. When he came back to the caravan he told them about his experience, and they looked for this garden, but they could find no trace of it. Returning to Medina, he was found to be the very man the Holy Prophet ﷺ had described as the man of his nation who would come across the gardens of Shaddād. But on the Day of Resurrection Allah Almighty will unveil these gardens for everyone to see.

13 — ṢĀLIḤ عليه السلام

OF THE PEOPLE OF ʿĀD there were some who remained behind in their old country at the time of the first migration under the king ʿĀd. Two hundred years after the prophet Hūd عليه السلام they still lived there and they had become numerous and were a big tribe. Their king had two sons and one day the brothers quarrelled. They divided the tribe and went in two different directions. One group went north under the leadership of the brother named Thamūd, and came to the valley of Hijr. They were more than ten thousand men. They come upon a peaceful people at a cross-roads of caravan routes who lived off the trade that the caravans brought to them. These they attacked and killed every single man. Then they took up their places and lived in their houses, which were made of mud. They took their flocks and their livestock, and when the first caravan came that way, they fell upon it, killed everyone and took all their goods. Nobody ever heard of that caravan again, nor of many caravans that followed it. Either they killed the men, or they made them into slaves and pressed them into their service. They became a wayward and haughty people and never did a day's work themselves; they considered that to be beneath their station. They went to war, indulged in their debaucheries and excelled in lying. It was to them a sign of intelligence, and whoever could tell the best lie was held in highest esteem.

The Lord sent the prophet Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام to the people of Thamūd. He was born as the son of one of their kings, and at his birth, a great light was seen around him, such as had never been seen before. Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام was orphaned when he was yet a small child, and though he grew up among those people, he was never like them. He was the son of one of their chieftains and he was of a gentle and lovable disposition. When he began to grow up,

Ṣāliḥ ﷺ wished to go out and join in the work in the fields, but his people stopped him and said, "It is not suitable for you to go and work as the slaves do, you are one of the high-born, and it is not your station to do labour." But Ṣāliḥ did not understand this reasoning. "I am of the children of Ādam," he thought, "and so are they, what then is the difference?" As Ṣāliḥ grew up and came into the age of reason, he began to understand the perverseness and waywardness of his people more clearly, and it depressed him to see them indulging in lawless activities. He saw them as an idle folk, spending all their time in long bouts of drinking and debauchery, while they drove their slaves to hard and cruel labour, with all manner of oppression.

The Thamūd lived in a city of mud-brick houses. One day they gathered before their tribal chief and decided to improve their houses. "We wish to move from these mud dwellings, for they do not withstand the winter rains, their roofs leak and earthquakes bring them down upon our heads." The council decided to move their dwellings into the mountains where there were caves. Driving their slaves hard with whippings and beatings, they excavated those caves, and dug and scraped the mountainside until they had made fine houses in the mountainside. In the Holy Qur'ān this is mentioned in this verse:

"... *and Thamūd who hollowed rocks in the valley.*" [The Daybreak, 89:9]

They moved into these new houses and continued their lives of immorality and indulgence.

When Ṣāliḥ ﷺ was about forty years old he was still clinging to the path of righteousness and had not adopted the evil ways of his people. They thought him crazy, because he never joined them and led a simple life and cared not for their entertainments. One day the aunt who had raised him after his parents' death, presented him with a glass of wine, for they had decided to make him drunk so that they might take advantage of him. His aunt set the glass full of wine before Ṣāliḥ ﷺ, but he smelled what it was and refused to drink it. He was disappointed and spoke to her, "O auntie, this I did not expect of you, you should have known better than to try and make me drunk. It is a for-

bidden thing, and you should follow me in avoiding such things rather than tempt me into joining you. Look at our people, what a lot of good-for-nothings they have become: they do not rise before midday, and all they do are useless, forbidden actions. The race of the sons of Ādam has been highly honoured, but man loses his honour if he leads such a life of drinking and gambling, dishonesty and falsehood." With these words he fled from the house and did not return. He ran into the wilderness, to a place where no one could follow him, up sheer cliffs and rock faces; there he sought refuge. While he was in hiding Ṣāliḥ ﷺ had a vision. He saw what at first looked like a mist or a dense fog, but soon he was able to discern a human face in this fog, and it was full of unearthly light. He saw a figure that had two wings resting against the face of the cliff. Then the apparition spoke to him and said, "I am Jibrā'īl ﷺ. The Lord has sent me to you to announce to you your prophethood. You are to teach and warn your people and call them back to the path of righteousness from which they have strayed."

Ṣāliḥ ﷺ took up his mission, as it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*And to Thamūd their brother Ṣāliḥ; he said, 'O my people, serve God! You have no other God than He; It is He who produced you from the earth and has given you to live therein: so ask forgiveness of Him, then repent to Him; surely my Lord is nigh, and answers prayer.'*

They said, 'Ṣāliḥ, thou hast hitherto been a source of hope among us. What, dost thou now forbid us to serve that our fathers served? Truly, we are in doubt, concerning what thou callest us to, disquieting.'

He said, 'O my people, what think you? If I stand upon a clear sign from my Lord, and He has given me mercy from Him, who shall help me against God if I rebel against Him? You would do nothing for me, except increase my loss.'" [Hūd, 11:61–63]

Time passed, and Ṣāliḥ ﷺ exhorted his people to follow the revelation he had received through the angel who came to him. The first people to follow him were the slaves and the low-born, the poor and the hapless. His following grew numerous, and they assured him of their support if ever there was to be a battle against the unbelievers. But Ṣāliḥ ﷺ wished to avoid bloodshed

for he knew that according to custom it would result in a blood feud that could carry on for generations and make all the land unsafe. He said to his followers, "No, it is not the time to fight. Our Islam does not require blood to be spilt. We will continue to give them guidance and hope that Allah might guide them through us."

As his following among the poor grew, so also the opposition grew stronger. But they could not prevent Ṣāliḥ's teaching from spreading. He taught them about mercy and mutual help, honesty and truthfulness, virtue and upright character, and about the value of honourable work. Those who followed him changed, they stopped lying and stealing from one another, they spoke no more bad words, and desisted from injustice and cruelty. They applied themselves to their work with zeal and pleasure, and realised that if a person puts forth his own best effort, Allah Almighty completes his task for him and lets him not go out empty-handed.

One day Ṣāliḥ ﷺ went apart from all his people, and climbed to the peak of an inaccessible mountain, taking with him a few tools, a pick and a chisel. Up there on the mountain-top he began to chisel and hew the rock and he kept busy for several years. Nobody knew what he was doing in that lonesome but beautiful place, but the townspeople were suspicious of his activities, and their priests and magicians warned them against the 'madman'. "The idols will curse him," they said, "his house will fall down, misfortune and disaster will strike him, and all his attempts will come to nothing." That mountain was taboo to them, and no one dared to climb it to check and see what Ṣāliḥ ﷺ was doing, for fear of their idols' curse.

Altogether there were nine tribes of Thamūd. Among them there were nine persons who were remarkably evil, and they are even mentioned separately in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Now in the city there were nine persons who did corruption in the land, and put not things right.*" [The Ant, 27:48]

About one of these Ṣāliḥ ﷺ had prophesied previously, he would be the cause of their destruction. Allah would not destroy them, he said, until a boy was born among them, with

blue eyes, a red face, and who was taller than average. Those were to be his signs. So whenever a child was born to them, they would examine him for these signs. This boy had now appeared among them, and his name was Sālif, and he was the most impertinent of them all. He grew up and was full of mischief, and he became Ṣāliḥ's worst enemy. He fell in love with a beautiful girl by the name of Sayḥa and he asked her to marry him, but she would not have him unless he became king of the tribe. So Sālif's ambition became to usurp the leadership which was the prophet Ṣāliḥ's hereditary position. For this reason his enmity grew, and he tried to incite opposition against Ṣāliḥ ﷺ.

From time to time Ṣāliḥ ﷺ would descend from the mountain and preach to the people, calling them to give up their evil ways and to follow the straight path. He said, "Allah Almighty is your Creator and He who sustains you, do not call on any but Him alone. And do not ask of me any miracle, for even if you are shown miracles, you will still not believe. The miracle that you ask for will be the cause of your undoing. Look at what your Lord has created for you, and consider how He has fashioned you in the best of all possible forms — is that not miracle enough for you? Those stones which you carve into figures and call your idols, can they help or harm you? You know they cannot, it is nothing but a superstition. Why then do you worship them?" Ṣāliḥ ﷺ preached and taught them as the Lord inspired him through the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ, but most of the people turned a deaf ear. There were a number who did become Muslims, but they were advised to keep their faith secret for the time being.

Ṣāliḥ ﷺ had not married. The girl with whom Ṣāliḥ's greatest enemy was infatuated said one day to her admirer, "I do not want to marry you, I would rather marry Ṣāliḥ, the prophet." "What! How can you prefer that madman to me? What has he got that pleases you?" "Oh," she said, for she was teasing him, "he has many things that are special. He has built a house up on the mountain where nobody else can go; his speech is different from that of anybody else, it is strangely compelling and leaves an impression on the heart."

And this was true, for when Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام spoke, people fell under the spell of his voice, they became silent and listened, in spite of themselves. Even if people turned against him and acted hostile, his words still left them impressed and touched them in a way they could not understand. When he heard his girl utter these words, Sālif grew even more jealous of the prophet and he plotted to remove him and to silence him for good.

Now the great day of their annual fair came along. Every year they celebrated a festival that lasted several weeks when all the various tribes gathered, there were games and competitions, and various kinds of heathen diversions. Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام sent word to the believers to gather the night before the great feast, and to come up to the mountain top where he had been busy building nobody-knew-what, for up until then no one had yet dared to visit the place. His followers flew up the mountainside as if they had wings, and they saw that Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام had built a mosque, surrounded by a lovely garden such as they had not seen below in the well-watered valley. Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام kept them there all night and taught them how to pray and worship in the house of Allah. In the morning Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام told them to return to their people below in the valley and take part in the celebrations. None of the 10,000 Muslims wanted to leave this blessed place on the mountaintop, but Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام ordered them to go. He announced to them also that from this time on there was no more need to keep their Islam secret, and that they should serve as an example to the others. For none of the unbelievers was truly happy; however great their riches and possessions, they never knew any real happiness or satisfaction, for their hearts were locked tight, obsessed by the greed for more. The Muslims' faith gave their hearts peace, and they had learned to be generous and to be content with what they had.

So upon Ṣāliḥ's command all the Muslims came down from the mountain, and the others were surprised at their great number. Some rash ones among them said, "What, all those are followers of that madman? Let's quickly put an end to this and kill them while they are yet unarmed." But others among them

were lazy and answered, "If you kill them all, who will be left to do our work for us? Better to just leave them ..."

Then Ṣāliḥ ﷺ appeared and stood upon a prominent rock overlooking the festival grounds which was the "speaker's corner". Whoever wished could address the whole crowd on that day, this was their custom. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ began to preach to them earnestly and he spoke of Allah who is the Creator of all living beings and that Islam was the way of Truth. His foremost enemy, Sālif, jumped up to the rostrum and pulled him by his beard, trying to prevent him from speaking. He was afraid that the whole crowd would fall under the spell of his words and would accept Islam. He had no right to do so, for according to their own customs, anyone who took that place could speak and say whatever he liked. So Sālif said, "If you truly are a prophet and if all you say is true, then you must satisfy us with a miracle."

Jibrā'īl ﷺ then came to Ṣāliḥ ﷺ and said to him, "If they demand a miracle it will lead them to their certain doom." Ṣāliḥ ﷺ loved his people as he loved all of mankind, and he implored them to ask no miracle of him. He advised them to look at the Creation of Allah Almighty: how the Lord had created man from a tiny drop and how He had made him grow, each person differing from the other, was that not miracle enough? He told them to regard the greatness of the whole Creation, the heavens and the earth, and all that grew and flew within and without.

But his people now insisted that he show them a miracle right there and then. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ asked them, "What then would you have me do?" Said the one who had challenged him, "See there on our festival grounds, there stands a big boulder, in plain view. We wish for this rock to bring forth a camel. This camel shall dwell among us and give birth to a foal. Then we can all see whether you speak the truth." The angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to Ṣāliḥ ﷺ and said, "The Lord will grant whatever you pray for." So Ṣāliḥ ﷺ prayed two *rak'ats*, then he raised his hands in supplication and prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, they ask of me this miracle, which will hasten their destruction. I do not wish for this to happen, but they leave me no choice. The

rest is in Your Hands, O my Lord." Whereupon the rock began to heave and sway before their very eyes, and from it issued sighs and groans as from a woman about to give birth. As they stood watching, it split in two and from it appeared a camel, as large as the rock itself, and all the people were dumbfounded and amazed. According to some reports, the camel after a little while gave birth to a foal which was quite as big as the mother. All the people were impressed with this miracle except the man who had asked for it, Sālif, and he said, "This is nothing but a magician's trick ..." Another account relates that Ṣāliḥ's camel grazed among them for a while and then gave birth to its foal without any signs of having been pregnant. But his people were still doubtful, and Ṣāliḥ ﷺ warned them in vain. Even though they disbelieved in the miraculous appearance of Ṣāliḥ's camel, the Almighty Lord gave them yet another chance to escape Divine Retribution, for the Lord is infinitely merciful with His creatures. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ told them that they must not touch or harm the camel or its young, and he warned them again of the doom that would befall them if they disobeyed that injunction. The Holy Qur'ān says:

"*O my people, this is the She-camel of Allah to be a sign for you. Leave her that she may eat in Allah's earth, and touch her not with evil, least you be seized by a nigh chastisement.*" [Hūd, 11:64]

and:

"*There has now come to you a clear sign from your Lord: this is the She-camel of Allah, to be a sign for you. Leave her that she may eat in Allah's earth, and do not touch her with evil, least you be seized by a painful chastisement.*" [The Battlements, 7:73]

So the camels pastured awhile in peace, for people had taken the warnings to heart. They had only one well, and one day the camel needed to drink. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ led her to the well, and she drank for so long that half the water in the well was gone. People grew alarmed and said to Ṣāliḥ ﷺ, "O Ṣāliḥ, your camel is drinking up all the water in the well. What shall we give our flocks of sheep and goats to drink now?" Still Ṣāliḥ's camel continued to drink, until it had finished all the water in the well. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ said to them, "Be patient, and obey Allah's

Command. By tomorrow the well will have filled again, and your flocks may drink their fill." And so it was: every other day Ṣāliḥ's camel drank, and on the other days people watered their own flocks.

Ṣāliḥ ﷺ told them to milk the camel, but they were afraid to go near and touch the animal, because they feared some unknown magic. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ assured them that as long as they did not approach it with a harmful intention nothing would happen to them. Everybody then brought a vessel from his house, and they began to milk the camel, and all the vessels were filled with the best milk they had ever had. One day the camel would drink, on the next day it gave them milk. "If only you believed wholeheartedly in the mercy of your Creator," Ṣāliḥ ﷺ counselled them, "you would need nothing but what this camel gives you, it would be entirely sufficient."

Some years passed in this way, and things would have gone well for them, but the evildoers among them did not cease to spread corruption. They incited a fresh dispute about the camel and the water-rights, and maintained that Ṣāliḥ's camels were harming their flocks. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ warned people again to stand off and to let the camels drink in peace, but the opposition of the idol-worshippers grew in spite of his warnings. His main enemy Sālif was still waiting for the girl Sayḥa to marry him, and she still refused him unless he became the chief of the tribe. Finally one day he lost his temper with her, and dragged her off by the hair, shouting at her, "Will you have me now, or must I drag you around town like this?" People lined the streets and laughed at the spectacle, and no one thought of helping the girl in her plight, for they were accustomed to mistreating their women. Still the girl stubbornly refused. "Only when you are chief of the tribe will I marry you," she said.

At last, the nine most vicious among Ṣāliḥ's enemies decided to put an end to Ṣāliḥ ﷺ, his camels, and his followers. The Muslims had become many by this time, so they said, "We will not be able to kill them all, but if we kill their leaders, Ṣāliḥ's closest friends and helpers, the rest of them will be confused and helpless. But we must do it secretly in the night, so that no

one can pin the blame on us." They began by following Ṣāliḥ ﷺ around covertly, to find out where he spent the nights. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ used to go up to his mosque on the mountain and gather his followers around him there to teach them, and in the evening he returned to his house. He had built a small hut next to the mosque, there he spent the nights. They also found out where ten of his most devoted followers stayed. They did not shy from murder, but they were yet afraid of the blood-feuds that might ensue if it became known who had committed the crime, so they resorted to stealth and secrecy. They divided up the murderous job: one of them would kill the camel; four would attack and kill the prophet Ṣāliḥ ﷺ, and four others would murder his companions while they slept.

The chief villain went to his girl in the morning and informed her that by nightfall he would be the hero she wished him to be, and that all this trouble with Ṣāliḥ and his camels would be over. The girl Sayḥa was not at her house, and Sālif found no one there but the aged female relative with whom she lived. As he came to her house, he heard her voice calling for help. "Where is Sayḥa?" he asked the old crone. "She is not here, she went out." "But I have just heard her voice, calling distinctly for help thrice. Tell me where she is." "How can you have heard her voice," answered the woman, "she went out the first thing in the morning with a sword, and she was going to kill that wretched camel of Ṣāliḥ's." Sālif was taken by surprise and wanted to know more. "Well," explained the old woman, "she wants very much to marry you, but she has pledged not to do so until you have become the hero of the tribe. Since you have not shown yourself man enough, she decided to take matters into her own hands and kill the camel in your name, telling people that you had done it and were now worthy of marrying her."

Sālif was much disturbed by this, for he had clearly heard her voice, so he ran out into the desert to look for her. He met a shepherd and asked him if he had seen the girl. The shepherd had seen her. "She came early in the morning, brandishing a sword. She tried to attack the camel of Ṣāliḥ, but the camel drew a deep breath and moaned. The camels breath came on

her like a tremendous wind and carried her away, far away, and I lost sight of her," the shepherd told him. Now Sālif was really anxious and he ran to the temple and consulted the soothsayers and magicians. The sorcerers had already heard the tale from the shepherd, and they knew that if the tale became known, nobody would dare to approach the camel again. But this young man who was infatuated with the girl would do anything, if they held her out to him as a prize. So they told Sālif, "We can see by our divinations and by the signs the gods have shown us, that she has been carried off to a distant place and she lives there under a spell. The enchantment cannot be broken, unless the camel of Ṣāliḥ is killed, and the gods are given their due ..." "But she is alive! When I have killed the camel I can marry her?" "Yes, my son," lied the priest, and Sālif stormed off to find and slaughter Ṣāliḥ's camel. "Surely I will do better than she," he said to himself as he ran along. He came to the pasture where the camels were grazing, and it was not difficult for him to distinguish Ṣāliḥ's camel, for it was larger than any of the others. It was sitting there dozing, and chewing its cud. He plunged in among the peaceful animals and struck down Ṣāliḥ's she-camel with one stroke of his sword, and not a sound escaped her as she died.

It was after the time of the night-prayer, and Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام was sitting with his companions in their accustomed association before breaking up for the night to rest. Jibrā'īl عليه السلام then came to Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام and revealed to him that his enemies and the enemies of Allah were planning their attack that very night. Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام did not tell his companions so as not to alarm them, but he said, "It is early still, let us stay together for a while longer and complete our association, it is a fine evening." Later when they were feeling drowsy, he said, "It is too late now to wander out into the night, you may all stay here this night, under the protection of my roof." The assassins meanwhile looked for their victims in the places where they usually spent the night. They climbed up the mountain to Ṣāliḥ's dwelling, and the earth trembled and shook, the roof of the house collapsed upon them and they perished in the rubble. The other group that had gone to the hous-

es of his companions was hit by rocks and boulders which the angels set in motion and they never reached their goals. Only one of the conspirators was left: Sālif the killer of the camel.

In the morning people came running to Ṣāliḥ ﷺ, for they had discovered that his camel was dead. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ immediately asked them if they had seen the foal. They told him it had run away. "If only we can find it in time," said Ṣāliḥ, ﷺ, "we might yet be able to save this nation from the chastisement Allah is sending upon it ..."

For since the time they had called for a miracle, Ṣāliḥ ﷺ had known that their doom was sealed and only on account of Ṣāliḥ's fervent prayers had the Lord delayed their punishment. The Lord had granted them respite for as long as the camels remained among them unharmed, and now in the she-camel's foal lay their last chance. Feverishly Ṣāliḥ ﷺ went in search of the foal and found it at last, standing upon the great boulder from which its mother had been born. He heard a voice coming from the boulder, which called out thrice to the foal, "Come down!", yet there was no speaker to be seen. Suddenly the rock split asunder, and the camel's young disappeared into the cleft, which then closed up again, so that the rock appeared no different than before.

Those who watched asked the prophet, "What does this mean?" and he replied, "Know that now only three days remain to you, then certain punishment will come over you." His enemy Sālif said, "Why should we believe you now, you have been preaching doom for so long. Whether it comes or not, we will carry on as we are used to doing, and why should we not do so! At last we are rid of the products of your sorcery, by the help of our new and more powerful idols. They will protect us against any more of your tricks ..." In vain Ṣāliḥ ﷺ tried to bring them to their senses as he preached to them one last time. "There is no power and no glory except with Allah Almighty, O my people. I am not dealing in magic or sorcery. I am warning you of the scourge the Almighty Creator is about to send down upon you, it will destroy you one and all. There is no escape, and its terror cannot be told in human words." "How will that

be?" asked the curious among his people. "These are its signs: on the first day your faces will turn blood-red, the next day your bodies will turn saffron yellow, and on the third day your faces and entire bodies will turn black. Then, on the fourth day, you will be destroyed." Ṣāliḥ ﷺ gave them this news and left them. He took his followers up with him to the mosque on the mountain, and they remained there in prayer and supplication. After a while, he received the command to leave the country and all the Muslims went with him.

The unbelievers stayed and celebrated what they took to be their victory over Ṣāliḥ, ﷺ for had they not finally driven him and his band out of the land? They danced around their idols and did all the forbidden things they could think of, and delighted in perverse pleasures. Only the young man, Sālif, who had hoped to be married to his girl that very night, was not yet satisfied, for the priests kept putting him off, saying, "We cannot let you have her yet, for you have not fulfilled your mission. Ṣāliḥ is still alive, you have not yet accomplished your task ..."

The first day passed and nothing changed. On the second morning, they looked at each other and saw that their faces had turned red and as the day drew on they became ever more red. The day after this, their bodies had turned yellow as saffron, and now they began to grow afraid, and dread spread among them. They ran about the streets, weeping and wailing, and they prepared their own shrouds from the hides of animals. The following day they had turned all black, as the prophet had foretold, and now their grief knew no limits, for they knew their doom was ordained of a certainty, and that there was no escape for them. They wept and wailed and bemoaned their fate, and wished for the calamity to come. But they were made to wait, and this waiting was to them the greatest of their sufferings. Three days were made to seem to them as three hundred years, as a punishment for what they had inflicted on Ṣāliḥ ﷺ and his followers for so long a time.

At last, the fourth day dawned, and as the day broke, Jibrā'īl ﷺ let out one mighty shout. This scream set in motion a gigantic earthquake; the air itself trembled and tore at their entrails,

so that they spit blood as their bellies burst and split open, and they lay in agony. Then the earth shook and brought down the mountain upon their heads and not a soul remained alive to tell the tale. Other accounts tell of a fiery rain that descended upon the city when the mountain erupted following the angel's scream, and the punishment continued for seven days.

Ṣāliḥ's ﷺ followers from afar heard the awful yelling and shrieking and they wished to go and look, but Ṣāliḥ ﷺ stopped them, saying, "The Wrath of God is not yet complete." After the seventh day he said to them, "Now it is done. But it is not good for the sons of man to look upon a site onto which the Wrath of God had descended. Whoever is with me, follow me now to where I shall lead you." So they departed with him, and no one remained or returned to that accursed place.

"*Thamūd cried lies in their insolence when the most wretched of them uprose, then the Messenger of Allah said to them, 'The She-camel of Allah; let her drink!'*

But they cried him lies, and hamstrung her, so their Lord crushed them for their sin, and levelled them: and He fears not the issue thereof." [The Sun, 91:11–15]

The city of Thamūd lay near Tabūk as it is now called, and it is known as "Madyan Ṣāliḥ". When the Holy Prophet ﷺ came to Tabūk, he showed his companions the traces of this site, but he did not allow them to linger there or to pray there, nor was anyone permitted to drink of the water of the place. Still today there are remains of old buildings and rock-hewn caves, but no one has lived there ever since.

Ṣāliḥ ﷺ led the remainder of his people towards Mecca. The exact location of the Holy Shrine, where the Heavenly House had been until the Flood of Nūḥ ﷺ, was unknown, but they settled in the vicinity. Ṣāliḥ ﷺ lived until he was 200 years old, and when he died they buried him there. As with most of the prophets, his exact gravesite is not known, but it is said to be between the *rukn* and Marwa, or else between the *rukn* and the *ḥajr*, the Black Stone. Peace be upon him and upon all the prophets, Amīn.

14 — THE BIRTH OF IBRĀHĪM عليه السلام AND HIS CHILDHOOD

FTER THE PROPHET ṢĀLIḤ عليه السلام had passed away, his nation spread out and peopled many lands. They settled along the banks of the great rivers, along the Tigris, the Euphrates and the Nile and built cities there. For a time they kept their Islam intact; eventually, however, they began to forget the teachings of the prophets and would not listen to their admonitions when they appeared among them.

It was Allah Almighty's plan to send the prophet Ibrāhīm عليه السلام (Abraham) to the people of Nimrūd (Nemrod), for they had fallen very low. All their kings were called Nimrūd, as the kings of Egypt were called Pharaoh. The Nimrūd we have heard about in the traditions was a great sinner and he knew no bounds, he did as he liked and no one dared to oppose him. No pretty girl was safe from him, he used to take every woman he fancied, regardless of whose wife, sister or mother she was.

Now among his many soothsayers and diviners, there was one young man who was in love with a young girl, engaged to be married to her. One day Nimrūd happened to see the girl, and she pleased him, so he took her for himself and kept her in his palace. The girl did not really object, for she thought she would have a better life at the court of the king than with one of his servants. When the young man had news of this, he was heartbroken, and from lovesickness he could not eat or sleep for days. His own mother was a sorceress, and his father was also a soothsayer for the king. The boy would not tell his father of his troubles, but at last he spoke to his mother and explained to her what had happened. She advised him to keep his peace and to let no one know of his state, as it was around the time of a great festival. She told him to go and mingle among the folk, to

drink with them and participate in their merry-making, then to prepare his revenge. He did as his mother told him, mixed and mingled with the people for a while, then he sent a message to the girl who had betrayed him and asked her about herself, and had she forgotten their engagement. She sent back a messenger with an answer, letting him know that she liked it fine and that he should not think about her any longer. Again the young man took counsel with his mother, and again she advised him to be patient a while longer. Soon, she said, occasion would arise, for Nimrūd saw many dreams and had great delusions about himself, fancying himself a god, the creator of heaven and the earth, and he frequently called his soothsayers and diviners to interpret his dreams for him. At that time he would be able to avenge himself on him.

Indeed, he had not long to wait for such an opportunity. Before long Nimrūd called all his counsellors to his court, for he had seen a dream which worried him. "I saw a star falling from the skies," he said, "but it was larger and more brilliant than the sun, and it fell upon my head. I could not open my eyes because of its great brilliance. What does this dream mean?" Obsequiously, his soothsayers reassured him, "You have seen your own self, of course, what else could that star be? You are the greatest and brightest of all, the brightest star, brighter than the sun, you are the god we worship." And they flattered him. Nimrūd did not like to admit that they knew something he himself had not known, so he said, "I knew this well, but I brought you here to test you." They replied, "It is you who gave us this knowledge so that we might inform you ..." And they praised and flattered him and his pride grew beyond measure.

There were many temples in that city and altogether they had three hundred idols, but most of them bore the likeness of Nimrūd and were dedicated to him. Nimrūd now said, "I am going to test you further. I wish to sacrifice one of you to our gods, the idols." And the soothsayers all were afraid, for they knew he would do exactly as he wanted and there was no one to stop him. The eldest and most venerable among them stepped forward and spoke, "O our Lord, your power and wisdom is

unsurpassed, but if you sacrifice us, who will bring you news from the unseen, who will translate for you the language of the stars, who will disclosethe mysteries of which we bring you knowledge? For many generations my family has served you, my father and his father before him have brought you much benefit ..." He spoke for a long time, and grew excited from his fear of being put to death, and in the end he suffered a heart attack and collapsed. "See here," said Nimrūd, "this is because he objected to my divine decrees, that is how I deal with the likes of him. I have no need to even sacrifice you ceremonially." With that, Nimrūd retired to his private apartments and all the astrologers ran off and hid themselves in fear.

None remained but the young man whose bride the king had taken away. He wished to have a private audience with the king, but the guards stopped him. "You cannot enter here," they said. "But I have urgent news for him, I have learnt important things from the stars." The guard was frightened and confused. After a while, Nimrūd emerged from his salon and was on his way to his harem, the women's quarters when he saw the young man waiting for him. He roared at him, "What are you doing here, have I not dismissed you all?" The young man prostrated before Nimrūd and said, "I have a most important message for you from the stars, and I must relate it to you." "What is your news then, be quick!" "My news concerns the true meaning of the dream you have seen, the star falling on your head: this star will be a child of yours by the woman you took for your wife most recently. She will bear you a son, and he will grow up to become greater than you, and he will wrest the power from your hands." "I know all you have to say before you ever thought of it," replied the deluded king. "I am your faithful servant, so I was obliged to tell you of this, to the best of my knowledge. Fare well." And he left Nimrūd there to wonder.

The girl he had just married was sitting by herself in a courtyard beside a fountain and she looked not at all happy. Perhaps she had seen her former lover and was thinking of him and of all that might have been, and it made her sad. The king saw

her sitting there alone and he thought to himself, "Ah, there she is, the latest bride, and she is with child. Unborn as he is, yet he raises his head against me, he lets not his mother stay with the other women, but keeps her proudly by her self." He approached very stealthily, carrying his sword hidden beneath his tunic. The girl sat staring into the water when Nimrūd raised his sword and cut off her head with one stroke, so that it tumbled into the pool, while her body fell alongside.

The young man was watching this scene and he went to tell his mother. "Ah," she said, "now you have taken revenge on your faithless bride, all that remains to be done is to take vengeance on the king." The young man told no one what had happened, but the news spread. The other soothsayers all assembled and were fearful and nervous, because they feared that Nimrūd would cut off their heads. He had given them 24 hours to interpret his dream. Then they came before the king and their spokesman announced, "We have taken counsel and we all agree. All night we have consulted the stars and practised our art, and we have all come to the same conclusion." Nimrūd said, "What is your word on this matter?" "One of your wives is pregnant," answered the diviner, and she will give birth to a son. This son will grow to be stronger than you and he will take the power out of your hands, cut off your head and also change your religion. He will break and destroy all our idols and turn into our enemy." They interpreted the dream as they had heard the young man do, for they deemed him to have been successful. "What do you suggest we do to prevent this?" Nimrūd asked them. "All the pregnant women must be locked up, and if they give birth to a boy he must be killed at once," said the soothsayers.

So the king issued an order, and they began rounding up all the pregnant women. The king's executioners went about the land and killed all the pregnant women they could find, ignorant of whether they carried sons or daughters. In time women learned to conceal their pregnant condition so that they would not be slaughtered. The women who were imprisoned saw no one except their gaolers.

The father of Ibrāhīm ﷺ was one of the close servants of the king and he worked as a maker of idols. He had grown sons, and his wife was already of an advanced age. Her monthly courses had long ceased, nonetheless one day she said to her husband, "I don't know what is happening with me, but I am again seeing my monthly flow." Her husband whose name was Azar, said to her, "Tell no one of this." One day she went to the temple of the idols and she was pregnant, though she did not know it yet. As soon as she had stepped before the idols, they began to scream, "Do not come here, come no closer, for he who will destroy us is in your belly." The woman grew afraid and went home to her husband and told him what had happened at the temple. "Be quiet, woman," he said to her, "perhaps that is what Nimrūd's dream signified, perhaps it will be our son who will destroy him and the idols — but if he should hear that you are pregnant, he will instantly put you to death."

So she pretended to be ill and took to her bed; but nobody was very surprised, because she was an old woman, and she hid her condition until the time approached that she was to give birth. Azar suggested that she go and give birth in the temple of the idols, nobody would think of looking for her there. So when the pangs of labour overtook her, she went to the temple, and at once all the idols began to screech even louder than before — but it was a sound which only she could hear. She was so frightened by their screams that she ran out into the wilderness and lost her way. In the middle of the wilderness a person full of light appeared to her, and it was the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ. He led her to a mountain and pointed to a big rock, saying: "There you can bear your child in safety." And upon a sign of his hand the rock split in two and a large cave became visible and she entered within it. In the cave she found water and all she needed, and there she gave birth to a son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and rested there for a day. When she looked at her son, she was strangely moved, for she perceived upon his forehead a light which shone towards the heavens, and he smiled at his mother.

The cave they were in was furnished like a palace, or more like a pavilion in paradise, with splendid draperies of silk and brocade. Mysterious servants came and went with wonderful food, they nursed her and the child and dressed them both in robes of light. She knew not whether she was awake or living in a dream. After three days she had recovered and felt that she ought to go home. The angel who had brought her came and said, "Come, I will lead you back to your home, for your people are looking for you." So she walked out behind him until they reached her house, and she returned as though nothing had happened. Indeed, nobody knew of her pregnancy and confinement, people thought she had been ill and gone to the House of Idols to be cured. Every evening she would leave her house, and the same angel would lead her to her son in the cave, and she would return in the morning. Though the cave seemed to her to be only a few steps away, in reality it was more than two months' wayfaring, for Nimrūd's city was on the banks of the Euphrates while the cave was near Damascus in the lands of Shām, at Barza. Even today this cave is shown to pilgrims as the birth place of Ibrāhīm, ﷺ and there is a little mosque built higher up on the mountain.

One day when Ibrāhīm's mother came to nurse her son in the cave, she saw a horde of wild animals assembled before the cave, lions and wolves and leopards, and she thought, "Alas, now they have eaten my son." But her guide reassured her. "Come closer," he said, "do not fear." The animals made way for her as she approached, and she saw the angels watching over Ibrāhīm's cradle. This time she found the cave decked out in even greater splendour than before and she marvelled at it. As she took her child in order to nurse him, she saw that he had stuck five fingers in his mouth. She pulled them out and saw that he was sucking from them five different substances. From the first finger he sucked butter, from the second honey, from the third rose-water, from the fourth syrup, and from the fifth milk. She noticed also that in a day he had grown as much as other children grow in a month. Each day he grew as much as in a month, and so in a very short time he had grown to be

quite a big boy. One day he asked her whether there were no other people living in the world besides the two of them, and the next time she came, she took his father Azar along to see him. They met, but the next time Azar came to look for the place, he could not find it.

Nimrūd's men were still killing off all the women and children of the land, until there was the threat of open rebellion, for the men were demanding their women and children back. "What will become of us as a people," they said, "if we are not allowed to have children? We will die out altogether." Thereafter Nimrūd let them give birth and killed only their sons, sparing the girl children.

For ten years they kept Ibrāhīm عليه السلام in the cave for they were feared for him. Once he asked his mother to show him the world outside the cave, and she led him out of the cave. Ibrāhīm عليه السلام looked at the earth and the skies and the sun, the mountain and trees. He was only one year old, but his mind was developed more than ten times his age.

The first thing he said was: *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bi-llāhi l-'aliyyi l-'aẓīm*" meaning, there is no power and no might except with Allah, the Sublime, the Almighty. They remained outside for a while, it was the evening and one by one the stars came out. "What is that, my mother?" asked the young Ibrāhīm. She answered, "That is a god, O my son." In the words of the Holy Qur'ān:

"So we were showing Ibrāhīm the kingdom of the heavens and earth, that he might be of those having sure faith.

When night outspread over him he saw a star and said, "This is my Lord." But when it set he said, "I love not the setters."

When he saw the moon rising, he said, This is my Lord." But when it set he said, "If my Lord does not guide me I shall surely be of the people gone astray."

When he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my Lord; this is greater!" But when it set he said, "O my people, surely I am quit of that you associate. I have turned my face to Him who originated the heavens and the earth, a man of pure faith; I am not of the idolaters." [The Cattle, 6:75–79]

His mother was angry at him at that time for refusing to believe in what they all believed in, and she was also afraid of all that was to come, for she guessed that Ibrāhīm was the boy prophesied to be the downfall of Nimrūd.

When Ibrāhīm ﷺ was ten years old, he was already as a young man. He was ten, or some reports say sixteen years old, when his parents came to him in the cave and explained to him why they had concealed him and brought him up in such a secretive way. Ibrāhīm ﷺ said, "My father, I understand very well, but I must tell you that while I was secluded here in the cave, my Lord, Allah Almighty, instructed me and taught me many things. I know that He alone is the Lord of the Universe and He has no partners. Nimrūd has made himself into a divinity at Ninive, but he is nothing but a mortal, a man like you and I, and a creature and servant of the Almighty Lord."

And he related to them the whole history of their country. His parents were shocked to hear him speak thus, and said: "Who has taught you all these things, how can you possibly know?" "Allah Almighty has sent His angel Jibrā'īl to me in the form of a man to show and to teach me all the things I need to know." Then his father grew even more afraid of him and his mother cried, "O my son, you have forsaken the religion of your fathers, woe upon us, you are uttering blasphemy in saying, 'God is one'! Why, we have so many gods, and we worship them all in our great temple ..." "No, mother," said Ibrāhīm, Allah is One, and only He is the Giver of Life and Death." And they could not agree.

Still they wished to take him home with them, for he had grown up and they no longer feared for his life. "We want to take you home with us, but you must promise to listen to us and to obey me, your father." "Yes, my father, you are my father and I must obey you." "Then you are not angry with us that we have kept you locked up here for ten years?" "Oh no, father," answered Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "you have suffered far more during my imprisonment than I have, for you were burning inwardly with self-reproach for having locked me up, while I was enjoying all the lessons my Lord taught me, and conversing with heavenly

beings." "Will you now do as I tell you, will you work as I instruct you to?" "Yes, my father, I will." "Ah, thank heaven, that we have been given such a son who has learned to obey without our having taught him." The three of them left together and returned to their house in the city of Ninive.

Ibrāhīm's father Azar worked as a carver of idols, he made them from wood and sold them in the market. He desired that Ibrāhīm ﷺ should learn this trade as well, the same as his elder brothers. They worked them lovingly and carried them to market with great care, gently as if they were their own children. But Ibrāhīm soon gave up treating them as gods, he just tied a rope around their necks and dragged them to the market, covered with mud and dust. He taunted them, "If you are truly gods, then you can get up and clean yourselves, and if you are thirsty you can get yourselves something to drink. People saw and heard him, and they thought, "Perhaps he is a little crazy," then they stopped buying from him because he mistreated their idols. One customer said to him, "Your idols are all muddy and messed up, and their noses are broken — I won't buy them from you. Your father and brothers venerate them and treat them with proper respect, while you seem to despise them and treat them no better than an ordinary piece of wood." "Oh no, uncle, I do respect them very much. Is it not they whom you set by the fire when you wish to cook and they prepare the food for you? Is it not they who bake your bread and do all the work for you?" "By no means. My son, you are mistaken, how can they do that, they are just pieces of wood which can neither help nor harm." "Then, if you know that to be the case, uncle," triumphed Ibrāhīm, "why do you worship them? If you wish to know a real and powerful God, worship Him who created you and all the heavens and the earth: Allah Almighty, the Lord of the Universe!" "O son, I am just a poor old man, how should I find the money to purchase such a mighty figure? All I have are a few pennies to buy one of those small wooden statues." "I want no money from you, my uncle," said Ibrāhīm, "you need only say the words: *lā ilāha illā llāh.*" Ibrāhīm ﷺ taught him these words and the man repeated them, and he felt his heart

grow wide and light with the repetition of this blessed phrase. He said, "Up until now I have never felt anything like this in my heart, never have I been so happy. What have you done to me? Have you worked some magic?" "No," said Ibrāhīm, "this is no magic, this is the light of true faith and the taste of Truth." In this way Ibrāhīm ﷺ taught his customers about Allah and the pure religion, and about the Unity of Allah.

People began to talk about this strange boy, to some he seemed very wise, others called him crazy. At last word came to his father, and Azar was very angry. He gave Ibrāhīm a good beating and scolded him for carrying on in such a way. Ibrāhīm ﷺ fled from him and hid himself. His mother began to weep and blamed her husband for failing to give their son a good education, after all, had they not hidden him away in a cave for so many years, how could he now expect him to behave like an ordinary person, being that he had never before lived among people? Instead of beating him, he should place him in the charge of the sorcerer and priests so that he could learn their ways and their religion. Azar went out and found his son, and took the blame upon himself, apologizing to people for his son's behaviour. Then he placed Ibrāhīm ﷺ under the guardianship of the priests in the temple of idols.

Ibrāhīm ﷺ remained there for a while, speaking to no one engaged in worship and in deep meditation and *dhikr*, remembrance, of his Lord. Nobody wondered at his behaviour, for they thought he was possessed by a demon, or mad with love for the idols. In any case, nobody dared speak against the son of one of the faithful servants of their king, and Azar was a respected man. But Ibrāhīm ﷺ never worshipped the idols, and he prostrated always in direction of the Ka'ba, but nobody knew this.

One day he looked around at all the idols and he said to himself, "Oh, if only I had an axe and could smash you all to pieces, one by one, all you false gods!" One of the guardians of the temple heard him utter these words, but he did not take the madman seriously then. Once a year there was a great feast when everybody put on their best clothes and brought offerings of their finest foods to the idols. They would go out into the

great square and make merry, drinking and dancing until they could stand no longer. All people were obliged to take part in this feast, only the sick and disabled were excused. They asked Ibrāhīm ﷺ to come with them, but he said: "I am ill, the stars have told me so, I cannot go today."

"And he cast a glance at the stars, and he said, "Surely I am sick ..." [The Rangers, 37:88–89]

So he stayed behind while everyone else had gone from the temple. When no one was in sight, he took a great axe and began chopping the idols to bits, he knocked off their arms and their heads and destroyed them. While he was smashing them he taunted them, pointing to the offerings of food that people had placed before them, saying, "Why do you not eat, why do you not drink, why do you not defend yourselves, if indeed you be gods and as powerful as they claim? You are only rotten bits of wood!" The greatest of the idols was made of gold, a seated image with two others standing on either side, one made of silver, the other of brass. Ibrāhīm ﷺ swung his axe against these too, but the axe could not cleave the metal. So he left his axe in the hand of the greatest idol and left the temple, locking the door behind him.

Soon people began streaming back towards the temple, swaying and staggering in their drunkenness, and the servant of the temple unlocked the great doors to let people in. When he opened the door, he let out a great shout, and those behind him also cried out aloud when they beheld the state of their cherished idols. News of this was relayed to Nimrūd, and he ordered an investigation.

"They said, 'Who has done this with our gods? Surely he is one of the evildoers.'

They said, 'We heard a young man making mention of them, and he was called Ibrāhīm.'

They said, 'Bring him before the people's eyes; haply they shall bear witness.'

They said, 'So, art thou the man who did this unto our gods, Ibrāhīm?'

He said, 'No, it was this great one of them that did it. Question them, if they are able to speak.'

So they returned one to another, and they said, 'Surely it is you who are the evildoers.'

Then they were utterly put to confusion, saying, 'Very well indeed thou knowest these do not speak.'

He said, 'What, and do you serve apart from Allah, that which profits you nothing, neither hurts you? Fie upon you and that you serve apart from Allah! Do you not understand?'

They said, 'Burn him, and help your gods, if you would do aught.'

We said, 'O fire, be coolness and safety for Ibrāhīm!'" [The Prophets, 21:59–69]

15 — IBRĀHĪM ﷺ AND NIMRŪD

THEY DECIDED to burn Ibrāhīm ﷺ in order to avenge their idols. At that time he was either 15, 16 or 20 years of age. The Angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ had been appearing to him ever since he had left the cave and brought him guidance, but his prophethood was revealed to him only after these events.

People then seized Ibrāhīm ﷺ and brought him before Nimrūd. It was the custom for everyone who approached Nimrūd to prostrate himself before him and wait to be addressed. When Ibrāhīm ﷺ was brought he neither prostrated himself, nor did he wait for the king to speak. According to one narration, they had constructed a very low portal so that whoever entered was obliged to bow down low. To avoid bowing before the king, Ibrāhīm ﷺ did not enter in the usual fashion, instead he entered it backside first, then he turned to face the king.

Ibrāhīm ﷺ spoke forthwith, "Here I am. What is it you want of me?" "Why do you not prostrate yourself before me as all the world does?" "I bow before no one but the Lord Almighty, Allah." "Who is this god, Allah?" asked Nimrūd. "He is Allah, the One and Only beside whom there are no others, and we worship Him alone." "What then is his speciality," asked the king, "what is it that this god of yours can do? I will do it better than he." "My Lord is the Giver and Taker of all Life," replied Ibrāhīm ﷺ. Nimrūd answered, "I too give and take life, just

watch this!" He had a prisoner brought and cut off his head. "See, he was alive, now he is dead." Then they brought another man from prison and let him loose, saying, "Go, you are free." The king said, "This man was counted by all as dead, and I gave him life. So you see, I am the giver and taker of life." Ibrāhīm عليه السلام argued no more about this point with the king, but said, "My Lord lets the sun rise in the East, can you make it rise in the West?" To this the king could think of no reply.

So they imprisoned Ibrāhīm عليه السلام in a very hot place on a mountain on which the burning sun shone all day long, and they gave him nothing to eat but a little salty barley bread, and no water at all. For a whole year they kept him there, and whenever he asked for water, they denied it to him unless he were to renounce his faith and return to the beliefs of his fathers, worship the idols and fall down before Nimrūd. But Ibrāhīm عليه السلام did not abandon his faith and it kept him alive miraculously. He called his father to come to Islam, but neither his father nor anyone else heeded his call. So there was no one to pay his ransom, and in the end they decided to burn him.

The king ordered all people to collect firewood, each person was made to contribute at least one log. They tried to load the wood on horses and on donkeys, but neither would obey, however hard they beat them. Only the mule was willing to carry the fuel for this huge fire, and for this reason the mule was made to be barren. The Lord has punished it for its cooperation in this unholy deed.

For a whole year people worked at collecting wood, and if a person was unable to go out and collect wood, he would spin some wool into yarn and sell it in the market. With the proceeds of his sale he would pay others to carry a double load of wood for the pyre on which Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was to be burnt. After a year they had amassed a mountainous pile of fuel, and they set fire to it.

Now they faced the problem of how to throw Ibrāhīm عليه السلام into the midst of it, for nobody dared draw close to the blaze, the heat of which could be felt for many miles around. Shayṭān then came along in the form of a man, and he taught them

to make a catapult of wooden beams. They seated Ibrāhīm ﷺ in it and were now ready to propel him into the roaring fire. Ibrāhīm ﷺ was not afraid. He never had any doubt, he calmly continued to sing praises of the Lord and recite the words *lā ilāha illā llāh, waḥdahu, lā sharīka lahu, lahu l-mulk wa lahu-l-ḥamd wa huwa ʿalā kulli shay'in qadīr,* there is no god but Allah, the One and Only who has no partner. To Him belongs all praise, and to Him the Kingdom and He has Power over all things.

Just before they threw him in, Nimrūd came to him and said, "You may make one last request of me and I will grant it to you." Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked for a glass of water, and they brought it to him. People wondered at this and asked Nimrūd, Why did you give him that glass of water when he is your greatest enemy? You have denied him water for one whole year, what is the meaning of giving him water now before he is to die in the fire?" Nimrūd answered, "He has asked me something to which I could find no reply, so I understood that I must do something to make good that deficiency. When he said, 'My Lord lets the sun rise in the East, do you let it rise in the West,' I knew not what to answer, so I am replacing my answer with this glass of water."

Pharaoh was a very generous king, even if he was a stubborn unbeliever, that is why his name is mentioned frequently in the Holy Qur'ān. But Nimrūd was very, very mean and tightfisted, and Allah loves not the misers and the greedy ones, hence his name is mentioned only a few times.

They were then ready to operate the catapult, but it would not work. Ibrāhīm ﷺ continued to praise his Lord and to sing His Glory, and people were very much surprised. The angels then went to the Lord Almighty and asked for Ibrāhīm ﷺ to be spared. The Lord replied, "Go to him and ask him whether he wants to be freed, and if he so wishes, you may set him free." Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to Ibrāhīm ﷺ and said to him, "Come, give me your hand, I will free you from this." Ibrāhīm ﷺ looked up and said, "Who has placed me in this situation?" "Allah Almighty did," said the angel, "by His Will alone, no one else is able to will anything." "And to whom belongs the soul?" "Your soul

belongs to Allah Almighty. Ask of Him the benefit of your soul, and ask Him also for safety of body, it is better than burning up in the blaze." "So," said Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "if body and soul are both from the One Lord Almighty, leave me and go about your business! It is He who has created me, and all happens according to His Will, do not worry about me."

Jibrā'īl ﷺ went back and wept for Ibrāhīm ﷺ. All the angels came to him and implored him to let them free him. The angel in charge of the winds said, "O Ibrāhīm, ﷺ if you give me permission, I will blow everything away, I will disperse this whole huge pyre and burn them all in it, no one will find safety from it but you." And the angel of the waters came and offered to put out the gigantic fire with all the waters in the world and to unleash a great flood in which all the unbelievers would be drowned. The angel of the earth came to him and offered to open up cracks in the earth and cause earthquakes that would swallow up all the evildoers. But Ibrāhīm ﷺ listened to none of them. He bade them all go back to their stations and remained there in dignity and patience, completely surrendered to the Will of his Lord.

Because of the spiritual power Ibrāhīm's prayers and incantations generated, his enemies were not able to throw Ibrāhīm ﷺ into the fire by means of the catapult the accursed Shayṭān had taught them to build. Again, Shayṭān came to them and gave them advice, and he said, "You must find two people, a man and a woman, and make them copulate in public, then this machine will operate." Nobody was willing to do this. At last two people were found, a brother and his sister, by the names of Chin and Gen, and they were of the gypsies. (Chin+-Gen = Chingen is a word meaning Gypsy.) So they performed before the assembled crowds, but however great their unbelief and corruption, the people were not pleased by this spectacle, and they began to curse and swear and scold the couple. As a result of this, the sublime spiritual energy diminished, until they were able to catapult Ibrāhīm ﷺ into the fire.

No sooner had he been dropped into the fire than all the trees that were fuelling the fire turned green and sprang to life

again. Springs welled up from the ground upon which Ibrāhīm ﷺ had landed, fresh grass greened along the banks of this flowing stream, and flowers and trees burst into blossom. All the burnt branches turned green again and alive with sap. Ibrāhīm ﷺ sat down by this miracle-river, and the angels brought him cushions and carpets from paradise. And they also brought three glasses of water from the springs of paradise. As he drank the first glass, a drop from it fell to the ground, and from this drop grew the Cypress tree. From a drop that fell from the second glass grew the small white, fragrant rose, and from a drop of the third glass grew the most highly prized of roses. Jibrā'īl ﷺ brought him food from paradise, and all the angels came and kept him company and he sat there and rested on a splendid throne in the midst of the raging fire which burnt like hell.

The unbelieving people all danced around outside of the fire because they thought they had finally done with their enemy. But all the animals came and brought water with them as much as they could carry in order to extinguish the fire, for they loved Ibrāhīm ﷺ. Even the bee came, carrying a drop of water in its mouth. Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked it what it was doing, and the bee answered him, "I know it is as nothing but as much as I am able to do I will seek to extinguish the fires of Nimrūd and free the prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ." For this reason the Lord made the bee give honey and all men to love it, for in it is "healing for mankind". The little birds also flocked towards the fire carrying water in their beaks. Foremost the nightingale threw itself into the fire. The Lord ordered Ibrāhīm ﷺ to question the nightingale, and the nightingale answered, "If our beloved Ibrāhīm ﷺ must burn in this fire, then let me burn in the same fire as he." The bird was told that the Lord had saved Ibrāhīm from the fire, and it wished to see him. It then beheld Ibrāhīm ﷺ sitting like a king amidst the splendours of what seemed to be a paradise garden, feasting on the Lord's bounties in saintly serenity.

The nightingale asked to be taught the Most Beautiful Names of Allah. These are counted as 99, or 1001, but in truth no one knows their number. The Lord taught him these Most

Beautiful Names, and the angel Jibrā'īl sat him upon the rose-bush. From that time on the nightingale is in love with the rose, for it was in this place that he first caught sight of Ibrāhīm ﷺ, Allah's prophet. And when the nightingale sings, it is calling out the Names of Allah Almighty with every note, and its singing touches our hearts.

All the animals brought water to put out the fire, all except the lizard. It stood aside and fanned the fire so that it would blaze up more. Ever since that time it was made lawful to kill the lizard. If one kills it with one blow, ten rewards are written, if one kills it with two, one receives seven rewards, with three strokes, five rewards are give and so on, with each stroke the rewards are decreased.

Three days passed. Suddenly people grew doubtful as to whether Ibrāhīm ﷺ had died in the fire or not and they began to think about what Ibrāhīm ﷺ had told them about his god. Even Nimrūd began to wonder whether there might be some truth to his faith. They could not see him in the fire, but their hearts were affected by his spiritual power. They began talking among themselves and asked each other for their opinions. One would say, "What do you think, could it be he is still alive?" And another would answer, "Even had he been made of iron he would have melted in that furnace by now. But he was only a man made of flesh and blood like ourselves. He is long gone."

Nimrūd had a daughter who sat in her tower looking out from a high window, and she gazed unceasingly at the fire, and wondered in her heart, "How did that young man fare who claimed that his Lord was Allah?" As she looked on, the smoke parted and a beautiful garden within the fire was revealed to her, full of roses and every flower, and she thought she was seeing a dream. She called out in her surprise, "O Ibrāhīm, did you not burn up?" "No," he answered, "my Lord has made a a paradise out of this fire." She ran to tell her father, and Nimrūd was very eager to see this as well. But the smoke did not part for him, so he used a machine that enabled him to fly through the air and view it from above. Nimrūd kept some large eagles which were always left hungry.

He had a little hut constructed which had doors on every side. They tied the birds to the hut and held out meat for them on long poles as bait. In whichever direction they held the food, there the birds would fly, thus propelling the carriage through the air. He had this construction made ready and boarded the hut, and the eagles flew with him above the fire. He was able to see right into the fire from above it, and he saw Ibrāhīm عليه السلام sitting in it, safe and sound. Nimrūd called out to Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. Ibrāhīm عليه السلام looked up and asked him, "What do you want?" "Why did you not die? Who has given you life in the midst of his blaze?" "He who has created both me and thee, and all the heavens and the earth, He, my Lord it is who gives me life." "If I, too, were to believe in your Lord, would he accept me?" asked Nimrūd. "Certainly," replied Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, "if you were to repent and turn to the Lord with sincerity of heart, He will accept and forgive you, and the past will be erased."

According to another narration the daughter of Nimrūd stood at her high window and watched Ibrāhīm عليه السلام sitting in the garden, which had grown amidst the fire. She saw how everything he touched came alive and sprang into fresh green, and she believed in the god of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, and witnessed *lā ilāha illā llāh, Ibrāhīm rasūlullāh.*

News of her attestation of faith came to her father Nimrūd, and he threatened her and had her beaten and tortured, but she would not renounce her faith. Finally he had her put to death on the cross. When people beheld that Nimrūd in his cruelty did not even spare his own flesh and blood, that he had no mercy with even his closest of kin, their fear and dread of him grew greater than ever before.

Since he could not kill Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, Nimrūd decided to let him go, as his counsellors and soothsayers advised him, to be rid of the nuisance. Nimrūd said, "I no longer want to contend with Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. I fought with him and his god saved him. Ibrāhīm is but a servant, I am a king. It behoves me not to fight with a slave, I will fight with his Lord, for that is my station."

So they made ready for him his flying hut, and the eagles had been left hungry for three days. Nimrūd took with him

bow and arrows as weapons, and two or three of his closest counsellors who held out the meat for the birds on long poles. When they had flown upwards for a while, Nimrūd asked one of his viziers, "What do heaven and earth look like from up here?" The vizier looked out and said, "They look as they always do, no different." "Then we have not yet reached our fighting position," said Nimrūd. They flew on. After a while he asked his vizier again, and he looked out and informed Nimrūd that the earth looked like a tiny speck, but that the heavens still appeared as usual. Still they flew on. At last the vizier reported that though the heavens looked unchanged, the earth was no longer discernible and appeared as a very faint mist in the distance. "Now we have arrived," said Nimrūd. He opened a small shutter in the side of the hut, took aim with his bow and shot off an arrow praying that it might hit and kill the god of the heavens. Allah Almighty answers all our prayers, not one of them is prayed in vain. He ordered the angel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام to bring a large fish from the seas and to place it in the way of Nimrūd's arrow. The arrow struck the fish in its side and was tinged with its blood. Jibrā'īl عليه السلام sent the bloody arrow back to Nimrūd who cried out, "Look, I have killed the god of the heavens, I am now the god of the heavens and the earth!"

They flew back down to the kingdom and stepped out before the people holding up the bloody arrow. All people now fell down in prostration before him, even those who had previously begun to have a little faith in the prophet Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. Everyone took the arrow as proof that Nimrūd had killed the god of the heavens, except for Lūṭ عليه السلام, who was Ibrāhīm's عليه السلام nephew, his elder brother's son.

But the fish cried unto the Lord, saying, "O Lord, what is my sin that You have placed me in the path of Your enemy's arrow so that he hit me with it?" The Lord revealed to him, "From this time on, O fish, I free you from being slaughtered by the knife," — for all meat is lawful only when slaughtered by knife — "your meat alone shall not be *ḥalāl*, lawful unto them when you are killed by the knife. Death for you will be to be taken out of the water, it will be enough." For when fish are taken out of the wa-

ter, they suffocate, wriggling on the ground, until they are dead. If people kill them by hitting them or cutting them, it is not lawful to eat their flesh, it is like eating a beast gored or strangled. And the Lord spoke, "I will avenge your blood, O fish." He ordered the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ to drip some of the fish's blood onto the earth. There grew from it some white poplar trees, and they grew quickly to a great height and multiplied rapidly.

16 — IBRĀHĪM ﷺ AND SĀRA

IBRĀHĪM THE PROPHET was still living among those wicked people and tried to teach them Islam. His own uncle came to Nimrūd and asked permission of him to get rid of Ibrāhīm ﷺ once and for all. Nimrūd gladly consented, for he would no longer engage in fighting a mere servant, but another was free to do so if it pleased him. The uncle led Ibrāhīm ﷺ to a barn filled with straw, tied his hands and set light to the bales of straw. "Now," he thought, "he must either burn up in the blazing straw fire, or he will suffocate in the smoke." But before he could throw Ibrāhīm ﷺ in, a wind sprang up and blew the burning straw into the crowd of assembled onlookers. The first thing to burn was the beard of Ibrāhīm's evil uncle, and whoever was around got his fair share of burns from the blazing straw fire intended to harm the prophet.

For a time Ibrāhīm ﷺ continued to call his people to Islam, for he now knew that he had been made a prophet and it was incumbent on him to perform this task for as long as there was life in him. But even his own father would not yield to the Call of Truth, as it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*'Father, serve not Shayṭān; surely Shayṭān is a rebel against the All-Merciful. Father, I fear that some chastisement from the All-Merciful will smite thee, so that thou becomest a friend to Shayṭān.'*

Said he, 'What, art thou shrinking from my gods, Ibrāhīm? Surely, if thou givest not over, I shall stone thee; so forsake me now for some while.'

He said, 'Peace be upon thee! I will ask my Lord to forgive thee; surety He is ever gracious to me. Now I will go apart from you and that

you call upon, apart from God; I will call upon my Lord, and haply I shall not be, in calling upon my Lord, unprosperous.'" [Maryam, 19:44–48]

Ibrāhīm ﷺ then understood that it was time for him to leave his native land. Before he left, he married his uncle's daughter Sāra who had accepted his faith and believed firmly in his prophethood. Even though he had warned her that he was a poor man and had to emigrate from their homeland, she was steadfast in her faith and her love for him, and resolved to follow him wherever the road would lead. When Ibrāhīm ﷺ still hesitated, the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to him and revealed to him, "Do not worry, your marriage contract is written in the heavens in the Presence of the Almighty." So he accepted her, and she was true to her faith. With them came his nephew Lūṭ ﷺ.

They set out together and passed through the lands of Mesopotamia, Shām and Palestine, until they came to the borders of Egypt. Ibrāhīm was the first *muhājir*, that is one who emigrates for the sake of his religion. Allah Almighty blessed and protected him all along his journey, no harm touched him and whatever he set out to do, had a good outcome. The prophetic light shone upon his forehead, he was pleasing to behold and of the most excellent, virtuous character.

As they passed through the land of Palestine, the Lord ordered Lūṭ ﷺ to stay there, for he was to become the prophet of three towns in that land. He taught according to the scriptures which Ibrāhīm ﷺ had received.

Ibrāhīm ﷺ came from the land or Ur, and possibly this is the city we now call Urfa. The fire of Nimrūd was turned into water and it is still there to be seen. There is also a mountain called Mt. Nimrūd, into the cliffs of which are hewn huge stone faces. And Allah alone knows the truth.

Now Ibrāhīm ﷺ went on with his wife to Egypt. At the time there ruled a king in Egypt who never left any beautiful woman untouched, and none was safe from him. Ibrāhīm ﷺ came to Egypt with a caravan of camels loaded with his trading goods, for he made his living as a merchant at that time. His young wife Sāra was exceedingly beautiful. After our mother Ḥawwā'

there had lived no greater beauty on earth. Knowing the habit of the king of Egypt, Ibrāhīm ﷺ ordered her to be placed in a packing box so that she was hidden from sight. The caravan came to the gates of Cairo. The guardians of the gates began to unload all his goods in order to exact the taxes due to the king, and one by one they unpacked the crates, until only one was left, the box in which Sāra was hidden. Ibrāhīm ﷺ told the customs officer that the box was full of silver and that he would pay whatever tax was due, there was no need to open it. But the more he tried to prevent their opening that box, the more they insisted on inspecting the box, customs officers then being just as they are today. "Perhaps you are actually concealing gold in it and trying to deceive us by claiming it is silver," they said. "All right," said Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "I will pay the dues for gold if you like, but I will not open the box for you." "There could be jewels and precious stones hidden in it," they said, "which would oblige us to exact an even heavier tax, and you are trying to smuggle them past our post ..." In the end they did open the crate, against Ibrāhīm's will, and in it they discovered Sāra, as winsome as the moon on her fourteenth night.

"Ah," they said, "so this is what you have been hiding. Good luck for us, we will bring her to our king, and he will reward us handsomely, and promote us in rank. What relation is she to you?" Ibrāhīm ﷺ said, "She is my sister," for had he admitted that she was his wife, they would have killed him instantly.

They led them straight to the palace of their king. Ibrāhīm ﷺ was left somewhere to bide his time, while Sāra was taken up to the king's private apartments. The king was pleased by the sight of this beautiful woman and reached out his hand to touch her. Sāra cried out, "Mind your manners. No one may touch the wives of the prophets." The king laughed at her and reached out again to draw her close. She said, "Have I not warned you to behave yourself?" As Sāra uttered these words, the whole palace trembled in its foundations and the king's hand withered and became useless and weak. He stuttered and tried to speak, but he could hardly move his lips to say he was sorry, and vowed not to touch her again.

As for Ibrāhīm ﷺ, when they took his wife from him to bring her to the king, his heart burnt in his breast and he prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, when they threw me into Nimrūd's fires, not a hair on my body felt its effect; and when they left me thirsting for a whole year, again I felt nothing of that torture. But this I cannot bear, I have not the strength to endure this pain. O Lord, protect my wife's honour. I entrust her to Your safekeeping!"

The Lord then made all the walls of the palace appear transparent as glass to Ibrāhīm ﷺ, so that he could see all that transpired between the king and his wife, and he could also hear the words they spoke. He witnessed how Sāra minded her honour and was not giving herself up easily. The king looked at his withered hand, and entreated Sāra to pray for him, so that his hand would be healed. She prayed to the Lord who restored the king's hand. But whenever the king looked at Sāra, he beheld her amazing beauty, and he could not keep himself from reaching out for her yet agin. As often as he reached out, she would cry, "O cursed one!" and the disease would return to his limbs, worse than before. Again he would implore her to heal him. After the seventh attempt, the king said to Sāra, "Please forgive me, I have wronged you. I will try to right my wrongs, by giving to you my slave-girl Hājar, will you accept my gift?" Hājar was also a descendant of the prophets, one of the grandchildren of Ṣāliḥ ﷺ and she, too, was very beautiful. Sāra accepted the present, and the king gave them leave to continue on their way as they pleased.

17 — NIMRŪD'S END

AFTER THESE EVENTS Ibrāhīm ﷺ had no wish to remain in Egypt, so he sold all his goods and returned to Palestine. He lived there until the Divine Command called him to return to Nimrūd a second time, to preach Islam to him yet again. He obeyed and travelled back to Ninive with his wife Sāra until he came before Nimrūd. "O Nimrūd," he said, "how long will you

continue in your misguided ways, calling yourself a god, whereas you are nothing but a mortal, and our Lord Creator is One and Eternal. He has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between and within them, come to the faith and say with me *lā ilāha illā llāh, Ibrāhīm rasūlullāh!*" In his revelations, Ibrāhīm had received Divine Scriptures, and all the learned are agreed in the opinion that the following verses from the Holy Qur'ān were already revealed to Ibrāhīm in the Scriptures sent to him:

"*Prosperous are the believers who in their prayers are humble and from idle talk turn away and at almsgiving are active and guard their private parts, save from their wives and what their right hands own, then being not blameworthy, but whoever seeks after more than that, those are the transgressors; and who preserve their trusts and their covenant and who observe their prayers. Those are the inheritors who shall inherit Paradise therein dwelling forever.*" [The Believers, 23:1–11]

On the strength of that verse, Ibrāhīm ﷺ called his people to believe in Allah and to turn towards Him repentant, not to forsake the trust placed in them, to commit neither adultery nor to eat forbidden foods. He warned them and gave them good tidings but still they would not believe in him, nor follow his ways. Of his relatives, Lūṭ ﷺ had accepted the faith long before, as has already been told. Ibrāhīm's mother believed in him before she died. But his father would accept no guidance from him, however much he entreated him. Azar had been a maker of idols all his life and he could not understand how it was possible to believe in something he could not see or touch. Ibrāhīm ﷺ left him, saying:

"*Surely I am quit of that you serve, except Him who originated me; and He will guide me.*" [The Ornaments, 43:26–27]

Though Ibrāhīm ﷺ had good reason to be angry with him, he prayed for his welfare, as it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Except that Ibrāhīm said to his father, 'Certainly I shall ask pardon for thee: but I have no power to do aught for thee against Allah.'*" [The Woman Tested, 60:4]

and:

"Ibrāhīm asked not pardon for his father except because of a promise he had made to him; and when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of Allah, he declared himself quit of him; Ibrāhīm was compassionate, clement." [The Repentance, 9:114]

Nimrūd also never accepted guidance since he fancied himself a god. "I am god," he said, "and I have power and great armies at my command. What does your god have to show for himself?" "My God," answered Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "commands the whole world, everything in it is ultimately fighting for His cause." "But of what does his army consist?" asked Nimrūd. Ibrāhīm ﷺ was divinely inspired to answer, "Mosquitos, the army of my Lord consists of mosquitos." Nimrūd and his court broke into peals of laughter, and they began to ridicule Ibrāhīm ﷺ and the mosquito-army of his Lord, saying, "What sort of an army of weaklings is that compared to our well-clad and well-fitted army with their coats of mail and their manifold weapons of war! We must arrange a contest between these two armies: your mosquitos and my sturdy fighting men, then we will see who is more powerful." Ibrāhīm said, "If that is what you want, that is what you shall have. I will depart from you and leave you to your devices, having warned you now time and again, yet always in vain. Make ready your armies then, and in a certain place at a certain time the armies shall meet and engage in battle." "What," they mused, "shall we then fight against mosquitos?" "Yes," answered Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "it is what you have asked for, in the excess of your disbelief."

When the angel Jibrā'īl had sprinkled the blood of the fish upon the earth, tall poplar trees had grown from it, and now these trees bore fruits. These fruits, or galls, were about the size of a man's head, and they were filled with tiny insects. On the day appointed for the meeting of the two armies, Nimrūd mustered his army he saw they were clad from head to toe in chain-mail, heavily armed with spears and swords and the like, and they also carried a kind of fly swatter to fend off the mosquitos. They assembled in the field in serried ranks, while Nimrūd repaired to a room on an elevated platform from which he could survey the battlefield. He was, however, apprehensive of this

strange meeting, and he had them fashion the keyhole to his room in a special way so that it was not straight but spiralled around seven times.

At the appointed hour the armies of Ibrāhīm's Lord issued forth from their nests in the tree galls, and so numerous were they that they blackened the skies, as a thick cloud or mist, and the daylight was obscured by their multitude. They launched their first attack on the army of Nimrūd. These mosquitos were made from the Wrath of God, so in their very first assault, they ate away all the iron and protective clothing the soldiers were wearing. Then they attacked a second time and they ate their way through the skin of the soldiers and into their flesh, they drank their blood and devoured their very bones, leaving nothing. Nimrūd looked on in horror and amazement, for he saw his whole army destroyed by these tiny creatures.

Among them there was one mosquito, which was lame and thus handicapped. It could not fight alongside its brothers, therefore it was very unhappy and wept and cried to the Lord, "O Lord, for what sin of mine have You punished me that I am lame and thus held back from doing my duty for You? Surely it is by Your Divine Ordinance, what shall I do?" The Lord answered it and spoke, "I have chosen you to perform the greatest feat of all, you shall destroy Nimrūd himself. Go and enter into his chamber." So the mosquito spiraled around the twisted keyhole until it got inside the room — a task none but a mosquito could have accomplished — and it found Nimrūd in great fear, because his entire army had been vanquished, disappeared with no trace. This mosquito now set out to fight with Nimrūd, and for three days and nights they fought. Try as he might, he could not catch the mosquito, it constantly eluded his grasp. Just when he thought he would smother it, it flew off to a high place on the wall and sat there grinning at him. For three days and nights Nimrūd neither ate nor drank nor found any rest, so that he grew weak and powerless, and still no closer to defeating the mosquito. At last he fell completely exhausted, and as he looked up he saw the mosquito perched high above him, and he let out a scream of sheer terror. The mosquito dived down and

flew into his nostrils. From there it made its way upwards into his brain. Nimrūd bolted out of his chamber in agony, screaming, "It is now in my head, it is eating me from inside ..."

But it was yet a long time until he was allowed to die, for Allah Almighty was teaching us all a lesson to remember. Nimrūd would strike his own head, and the mosquito momentarily stopped its chewing and moving about inside his head, then it resumed its activity. All peace and sleep and rest left him, and he could relax only for a few moments when his head was being hit. He had special instruments and hammers devised for hitting him on the head, and he stationed special slaves beside him day and night. In time the mosquito grew to enormous proportions and the more it grew, the more it ate, and the more it moved around inside Nimrūd's head, causing him agonizing pain. Each time his slaves had to hit his head harder and harder with the hammers, so that the mosquito would stop chewing for a moment. The slaves also grew tired of this, for they were allowed no rest, and soon they began to mutter, "If he were really a god, this king of ours whose head we are beating, would a single mosquito be able to cause him such suffering? He neither eats nor sleeps, he is in constant agony, we must find a way to put an end to his suffering, and to ours too, for he permits us no rest." And all the people in the Kingdom began to wonder how it was that Nimrūd was unable to help himself out of this situation if he was a god, and why their idols in the temple came not to his succour?

After this crisis had lasted for some months, one day one of the slaves tied a heavy stone to the hammer he used to hit Nimrūd's head, and he dealt him a blow with all his might, so that his head split apart in two. From out of his cracked skull flew the mosquito which had meanwhile grown to the size of a small bird, and everyone stared at it in amazement as it flew away. Such was Nimrūd's death.

Other Nimrūds came after him, but the story of this king remains as a lesson for all, how the punishment of Allah destroyed the power of the greatest king, so that he had to let himself be beaten to death by his slaves.

The prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ meanwhile had left the country and was travelling on with his wife Sāra and her maidservant Hājar. He bought a large plot of land and wanted to begin farming it, but the people living near him were hostile and thought him crazy, because he worshipped other than their gods and spoke out against their idols. They refused him their help in setting up his household, and they would not sell him aught that he needed.

One day he said to his wife, "I am going to a distant market place where I hope to buy grain and flour for our needs and for sowing, for our neighbours here will sell us nothing." Before Ibrāhīm ﷺ set out, these people had already sent messengers to the town he was bound for, warning people there not to have anything to do with him and to sell him nothing. They said, "We do not want him staying here among us, who knows what he will do to us after he has killed our god and mighty king with his little flies ..." The people in the market-town agreed not to sell him any grain, and they refused to even speak to him when he arrived there. So Ibrāhīm ﷺ set out on his return-journey empty-handed and heavy-hearted. He had with him his string of camels, and all their saddle-bags were empty. He thought to himself, "Now my enemies will rejoice, seeing I have made this journey in vain ..." And he did not want to grant them this satisfaction, so he stopped in the middle of the desert and filled all his bags with sand and loaded them onto the camels.

When he arrived at his house he was welcomed by his family and servants, and he bade them unload the camels while he retired into his garden to take his rest. His neighbours were curious to see what he had succeeded in buying, but since they could not very well go and look themselves — for they were not on speaking terms — they sent their children out to spy for them. The children ran around and pretended to be playing, and they peeped into the bags, went back and told their families that these were full of wheat and flour.

Ibrāhīm was dozing in his garden and he was awakened by the smell of fresh bread. He knew there had been nothing in the house before he left, and he knew that he had not bought

anything, so he wondered and went in to ask his womenfolk where they had found the flour to bake the bread. Sāra handed him a piece, laughing, and said, "O Ibrāhīm, it was you yourself who brought us all these bag loads full of first-rate flour and wheat that was unloaded in our courtyard, do you not remember?" "But Sāra," he said, "it was nothing but sand that I had packed into the bags so that our neighbours would not see me returning empty-handed. I planned to throw it out as soon as everyone had gone to sleep." "Well, we have taken it and baked it into bread," said Sāra.

Now Ibrāhīm ﷺ went out to look at his full storage rooms and found that indeed all the sand in the bags had turned into wheat and barley, and the finer grained sand had turned into flour. He realized then that it was a miracle from the Almighty Lord, and he gave thanks and praised His boundless Generosity. Then he went to sow some of the wheat and barley on his fields, and the Lord gave him increase and there was *baraka*, blessing on all his undertakings.

18 – IBRĀHĪM ﷺ AND HĀJAR

STILL IBRĀHĪM AND SĀRA had no children, so one day Sāra said to her husband, "Go and take my maid Hājar for your wife, perhaps she will bear you a child, and we will love her children as if they were our own." Hājar has been with them for a long time now, and Ibrāhīm ﷺ was pleased with Sāra's suggestion. The contract was written, and the couple were married. But after Ibrāhīm ﷺ had married her maidservant, Sāra grew jealous of her and could no longer bear her company. She ill-treated her in every way, beat her, pierced her ears and her nose, and at last she circumcised her. And Hājar wept and wanted to leave and suffer no more. Ibrāhīm was informed by the angel Jibrā'īl of what had happened and he was then ordered to perform the circumcision on himself, and it was ordered for the women of that time as well. Sāra was also ordered to have her ears and nose pierced by Hājar. It was the

Divine Command, and her faith was strong so she submitted. When the Command came to Ibrāhīm, it was the time of the harvest, and he had in his hand a scythe for cutting the wheat. As soon as the angel told him about the circumcision, he performed the operation on himself with that instrument, although it was extremely painful. Jibrā'īl ﷺ said to him, "O prophet of Allah, had you only waited, I would have brought you an instrument more suitable, which would not have caused you so much pain." Ibrāhīm ﷺ replied, "The Command of the Lord brooks not a moment's delay."

But Sāra continued to pursue Hājar with her jealousy, until one day she fled from her into the desert. A person came up to her there and asked, "What are you doing here, in the middle of nowhere?" "I am running away from my mistress Sāra, for she treats me harshly and I have had enough, let her keep her husband for herself." The angel, for that he was, said, "Go back. It is Allah's Will that you should bear a son who will become the forebear of the prophet of the last times. This is a great honour for you, so return to your house and be patient." She then returned and bore patiently all Sāra's jealousy. In time she conceived and gave birth to a son, and she called him Ismā'īl. Before his conception, Ibrāhīm ﷺ had prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, grant me a son to become my successor in this world and in the prophethood, and I will sacrifice to you that which I love best in all the world." Every day he repeated this vow. When Hājar had born the child, Sāra became even more violently jealous. She spoke to Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "Go take them away, out of my sight with them, I cannot bear their presence here." Ibrāhīm ﷺ replied, "O wife, what shall I do with them? Hājar was a slave-girl, she has no one in the whole world to look after her and she has no place to go." But the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ appeared to him and ordered him to heed Sāra's words and to do as she bade him. She knew not what she was saying, but her words contained wisdom nonetheless. He said, "Put them upon a camel, and take with you some food and water and set out with them after the dawn prayer. Wherever the camel kneels, there you will leave them and return alone."

Ibrāhīm ﷺ did as the angel revealed to him. They set out in the early morning and rode along until nearly midday. By that time they had come to a waterless place in the desert where there were no trees or shrubs nor any living, green thing, only mountains, stones, and sand. In this place the camel chose to kneel down. Ibrāhīm ﷺ then dismounted and lifted Hājar from the saddle. She looked around and asked, "O Ibrāhīm, is this where you want to leave us?" "I am commanded by my Lord," he said, "I confide you to the care of Him who has created you and ordained your provision." With that he left, for he had no permission to say any more. He returned to his home before the high noon.

Hājar and her son remained where he had left them. For a day or two she ate of the provisions she had brought along and Ismā'īl was still a suckling baby. She ate and drank all she had, until there was no more. It was an extremely hot and shadeless place. She grew very thirsty. She left the infant Ismā'īl in that place and went in search of water.

She ran to a nearby hill which is called Ṣafā, where she stood and looked out, then she ran down and up another hill, which is called Marwa. On her way, there was one spot from where she could not see her son, and because of this she ran quickly for a few steps, so as not to lose sight of him for long. Therefore it is obligatory for us on Ḥajj to run when we reach this place between the hills of Ṣafā and Marwa. Seven times in all she ran to and fro between the hills, and her baby was already turning blue from crying so hard. Hearing his voice, she feared that the birds of prey circling overhead might have attacked him. As she stretched to look, she saw her son strike the ground with his foot. Where his foot struck the ground, a spring of water gushed forth and began to flow. Hājar was afraid that the precious water might run into the sands before she had a chance to drink of it, so she rushed to pile sand around the source to contain it and to form a pool, and to this day it is found there in a well called Zamzam.

Hājar was grateful and thanked Allah for this miracle, and she drank from the water and gave her son to drink, then

washed her hands and face and prayed. "O Lord," she said, "You have saved us by this well of water so that we should not die of thirst, but what shall we eat here in this lonesome place?" In response a voice was heard coming from the well of the Zamzam, "If you are thirsty, drink of this water and your thirst will be quenched, if you are hungry, drink of this water with the intention of eating and your hunger will be stilled, and if you are ill, drink of this water with the intention of healing and Allah Almighty will heal you. Whatever your needs may be, the Zamzam well will fulfill them." Hājar thanked the Lord for His great Mercy and remained there by the well, drinking from its miraculous water which sufficed her every need.

Allah Almighty intended to make that place a centre of worship for all times and peoples to come, so it was in accordance with the Divine Plan and not from lack of compassion that Ibrāhīm ﷺ had left Hājar with his son in that desolate place.

Some time passed. One day a caravan happened to pass nearby that had lost its way. When a caravan lost its way, it meant certain death to all the men and their animals, the camels and sheep that belonged to it, a terrible death of thirst in the sands. This caravan had given up all hope and was straying about at random, when suddenly they espied birds high in the sky circling around a certain place. This was a sure sign of water to them and they decided to go and look, for they had nothing to lose. As they neared the place, they beheld a strange light radiating from it, like the light of a star. They drew near and found there a small child. They saw that the light shone from the forehead of this child, for this was Ismā'īl, our Holy Prophet's forebear, and the Light of Muḥammad ﷺ shone upon his brow. They also saw a young woman, sitting there quietly, holding the child on her lap, and they spotted the blessed well of Zamzam water. There was nothing else in the midst of the vast desert.

At first they addressed her fearfully, saying, "O our sister, who are you? Are you of mankind, or of the Jinn, or are you one of the angels? We had given up all hope for our lives, now Allah Almighty has directed us towards this place where there

is water; we can scarce believe our eyes." "We, like you, are of the children of Ādam," answered Hājar with a smile, "we are neither of the angels nor of the Jinn." "And what do you live on, out here in this forlorn place?" they asked. "All we need is in this well of Zamzam, it suffices us as food and drink and remedy for all our ills." "May it please you to let us drink from the water too, for we are dying of thirst. We will surely pay you the price." "Drink your fill," said Hājar, "for it is free, and a mercy from the Almighty."

So they drank their fill, and their lives were saved. Now these people of the caravan came from a land of swamps and marshes, and they were all afflicted by a disease that is common to such areas. Their bellies were distended and swollen, while their arms and legs grew thin and their complexion sallow. When they had drunk their fill, quenched their thirst and stilled their hunger, they drank again with the intention of finding a remedy for their disease. Their inflated bellies shrank to normal size, their complexions assumed a healthy shade, and they felt fit and full of vigour. They said to Hājar, "O our sister, allow us return and bring our families here. We will build a city around this wonderful well, and we will make you our queen." Hājar did not object, so they began to build houses to protect them from the sun, and they travelled back to their country to fetch their families. And they were a God-fearing and good natured people.

19 – IBRĀHĪM عليه السلام AND ISMĀ'ĪL عليه السلام

IBRĀHĪM عليه السلام came from time to time to that place to visit Hājar and his son. But his wife Sāra had made him promise that he would not stay there, would not eat with them nor even dismount from his camel. When Ismā'īl عليه السلام was seven years old or according to some narrations ten or eleven years old, the Lord sent Jibrā'īl عليه السلام to Ibrāhīm عليه السلام to remind him of the vow he had made before Ismā'īl was born to him: that he would sacrifice to the Lord that which he loved best in the world, if only He

granted him a son. Ibrāhīm ﷺ was reminded of his forgetfulness, and he instantly slaughtered one hundred sheep and sacrificed them on the altar, for they were the best thing he had. The Divine Fire descended from heaven, and they disappeared from sight, and Ibrāhīm ﷺ knew by this sign that his sacrifice had been accepted.

But again the Lord sent the angel to Ibrāhīm ﷺ and told him that he had not yet fulfilled his vow. The angel said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I love Your prophet Ibrāhīm so very much and it hurts me to give him painful and unwelcome news; please do release me from the obligation of bringing him these tidings." So the Lord revealed to Ibrāhīm ﷺ in a dream that he had not paid his debt to Him in full. The next day Ibrāhīm ﷺ went and slaughtered a thousand camels. Again the fire descended and transported them away, and Ibrāhīm ﷺ knew that his sacrifice had been acceptable.

The third night, Ibrāhīm ﷺ again saw a dream in which the Lord reproached him for not having met his obligation. So Ibrāhīm ﷺ went and slaughtered 100 horses, Arabian thoroughbreds, of which he was very fond, and again the fire took them all away. The fourth night, again he saw a dream, "O Ibrāhīm," said the Lord, "you are not keeping your word which you have given to Me. For what you love most in the world are not your sheep, your camels or your horses, but it is your own little son. Until you have sacrificed him to Me, you will not have fulfilled your vow."

Ibrāhīm ﷺ saw this dream no less than 70 times during the night, and the dreams of the prophets are revelations of truth, they are not whisperings of the devil. Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked the Lord, "O my Lord, how shall I do this thing? How shall I tell Hājar, and Ismā'īl?" But he was obedient, and he took a rope and a knife, went toHājar and said to her, "O Hājar, bathe our son and anoint him, dye his hands with henna, and robe him in clean, new clothes, for I wish to take him with me beyond the mountain where lives a friend of mine whom I am planning to visit."Hājar did as she was told and prepared Ismā'īl to go out with his father.

Shayṭān the accursed was lingering nearby, and he approached Hājar in the shape of a man and asked her, "Where is your son?" She replied, "He has gone out with his father to visit one of his friends." "If that is so," said Shayṭān, "why does he take with him a knife and a rope? No, I will tell you his true intention: Last night he saw a dream and he believes it is a revelation from the Lord, whereas it is only the whispering of Shayṭān. In this dream he was ordered to go and sacrifice his only son, and he has now gone to do that." Hājar replied, "My husband is a prophet and a messenger among the prophets — how should he commit such a dastardly deed?" "Go see for yourself then, check on him, I am telling you the truth." She said, "If it truly be the Command of the Lord, then we shall obey His Command," for she was of strong faith. "If He commands me to give up my own soul, or my only son, I will obey. Ibrāhīm عليه السلام does not receive voices from Shayṭān, if he has gone to do this, then it must be a revelation from the Almighty." She then recognized Shayṭān for what he was and she drove him from her threshold, and cursed him.

In disguise the devil approached Ibrāhīm عليه السلام as he walked along his way, and he saluted him and said, "O Ibrāhīm, where are you going?" "I am going to see a friend." "Why are you carrying a knife and a rope when you go to visit your friend? If this were true, you would surely be bearing other gifts. Let me tell you what you are intending to do: you have seen a dream, and in accordance with this dream you intend to commit a heinous crime, you are about to slaughter your own son, is it not so?" Ibrāhīm عليه السلام recognized the speaker and said, "Depart from me, O accursed one," and he drove him from his side.

The boy Ismā'īl was running along ahead of his father, enjoying the fine day and happy to be on this outing with his father. Each time Ibrāhīm عليه السلام looked at him, he thought of what he had to do to him and felt as if his heart would burst from the pain. So he said to the boy, "O my son, do walk behind me, it is more suitable." Ismā'īl walked behind him, prancing about his father and playing with him, tugging at his cloak and fooling around as all little boys of his age have ever done, for it was a

happy day for him. Iblīs who had failed in his attempt to sway both Hājar and Ibrāhīm ﷺ thought, "For sure I will succeed with this child," and he did what he could to distract them and make them lose their way. When Ismā'īl stayed behind his father, Shayṭān came to him and asked, "Where are you going today?" "I am going with my father to visit his friend." "That is what you think, little boy, but let me tell you what he is really going to do: he is taking you to a certain place in the mountains to slaughter you there." "What? My father slaughter me?" "Have you not seen the rope and the knife which he carries with him? For sure that is what he is planning to do." Ismā'īl ﷺ said to him, "Go away, you horrible man! My father is a prophet, and if he wants to slaughter me, how should I object or oppose him? Go away, for you are the Evil One!"

But Shayṭān did not leave him in peace, he attempted again and again to instill doubt in Ismā'īl ﷺ with all manner of arguments. At last Ismā'īl ﷺ picked up three stones from the ground and threw them at Shayṭān, and one of them hit him in the eye so that he was injured. All this took place in the valley of Mina, where we now perform the rite of stoning Shayṭān during the Ḥajj.

At last they reached the place ordained and Ibrāhīm ﷺ said to his son, in the words of the Holy Qur'ān:

"... *and when he had reached the age of running with him, he said, 'My son, I see in a dream that I shall sacrifice thee; consider, what thinkest thou?'*

He said, 'My father, do as thou art bidden: thou shalt find me, God willing, one of the steadfast.'" [The Rangers, 37:102]

Ismā'īl ﷺ voiced not one objection, he did not doubt or hesitate for a moment, he was completely surrendered to his Lord's Will. Ibrāhīm ﷺ placed his son on the ground in order to perform the sacrifice. Ismā'īl ﷺ said to him, "O my father, do bind my arms and legs so that I might not commit an act of disobedience in spite of myself: I might strike out with my arms or legs when I feel the pain of the knife, and I might hurt you thereby." For man does not surrender his soul easily and willingly, he fights for his life with all his might. Then Ibrāhīm ﷺ wished to

carry out the Lord's command, but he found he could not do so. Ismā'īl ﷺ spoke again, "O father cover up my eyes with this piece of cloth so that you do not have to look at my face!" He tied the cloth around his head so that they could not see each other. Ibrāhīm ﷺ felt as if his insides were on fire. He raised up the knife 70 times, but it would not cut Ismā'īl's throat.

Then Ismā'īl spoke again. "O my father, it seems you cannot kill me while you are facing me. Why not turn me around and try cutting from the back." Ibrāhīm ﷺ tried this also, but still the knife would not cut Ismā'īl's throat. He grew angry and hurled the knife at a stone, reproaching it for not cutting, although he had carefully sharpened its blade. The knife then proved to be so sharp that it cut through the stone as if it were soft cheese. Ibrāhīm ﷺ scolded the knife and said "What do you think you are doing, causing me the pain of 70 attempts to slaughter my own son? You can manage to slice a big boulder as if it were a piece of cheese, but you cannot cut the soft flesh of my son?" Allah Almighty then gave the knife a voice to speak and it said, "Why did the fire not burn you?" "Because my Lord had ordered it to be cool and a safety for me." "So you see, the fire did not burn you after being ordered only once; since you have taken me in hand, I have been ordered 70 times not to cut through even a hair from the body of your son." Ibrāhīm ﷺ spoke to the knife in the tongue of *ḥāl*, that is in a special state of consciousness, and nobody else could hear this speech.

Ismā'īl ﷺ was waiting on the sacrificial altar and he called, "O father, let us praise the Lord and glorify Him, perhaps He will make your task easier for you." He began to redcite: *Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar,* and Ibrāhīm ﷺ continued, *lā ilāha illā llāh wa-llāhu akbar.* Then they heard a heavenly voice completing the phrase, *Allāhu akbar wa li-llāhi l-ḥamd.*

They then beheld the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ descending from the heavens, leading a ram. This ram was the ram of Qābīl and Hābīl. When Hābīl placed his offering on the altar, it was transported into paradise and pastured there all this time, until it should be the ransom for Ismā'īl ﷺ. Ibrāhīm ﷺ turned towards

it and slaughtered it in Ismā'īl's stead, then he remembered that his son was still bound upon the altar, and he turned to untie the ropes on his hands and feet. But he found they were already loosened and undone. "Who has untied these ropes?" he asked. "He who has sent the ram has also undone my bonds," answered Ismā'īl ﷺ.

Then Jibrā'īl ﷺ said to Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "O Ibrāhīm, the Lord wishes to grant fulfillment to three of your prayers. Pray for whatever you wish." Ibrāhīm ﷺ said, "O Lord, I love the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ. I wish to pray for them." How could Ibrāhīm ﷺ have knowledge of the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ? When he was very young and had not yet left his hiding place in the cave, he looked up at the stars and the skies, and he perceived the whole Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ as if they were seeds placed in the sky, and among them he saw a light as the light of the sun. He was told that this was the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ, and he was also able to tell which of the seeds among them were destined to be disobedient transgressors. He prayed to the Lord to destroy these. But the Lord had answered him, "No, do not pray against them, because I have given them four things: I forgive the wrongdoers among them for the sake of those who do good; secondly, they may repent and return to Me; thirdly, I forgive them through the intercession of their Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, and fourthly, I am the Forgiving, the Oft-Returning."

"*We called unto him, 'Ibrāhīm, thou hast confirmed the vision: even so We recompense the good-doers. This is indeed the manifest trial.'*

And We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice, and left him among the later folk. 'Peace be upon Ibrāhīm!'" [The Rangers, 37:104–109]

The Lord had promised to fulfill three of Ibrāhīm's prayers: Firstly he prayed, "O Lord, have mercy on the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ. Secondly he prayed, "O Lord, do not cause the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ to suffer!" And thirdly he prayed, "O Lord, forgive the Nation of Muḥammad." All three prayers he prayed for the Nation of Muḥammad, for he had been shown the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ in a vision before he was called to prophethood.

After this Ibrāhīm ﷺ thanked the Lord and praised Him and said, "*Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, the Lord has given me patience in this great trial!" Ismā'īl ﷺ spoke up and said, "O father, my patience was yet greater than thine. You were willing to sacrifice your only son, but you may yet have other children after his death. I, however, have only one life and one soul, and I was willing to give it up in obedience to my Lord's decree. Therefore I am more generous than you." "No, Ismā'īl, I am the more generous. My sacrifice was the greater one," said Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "for I was called upon to act, to sacrifice you with my own hand and seeing eye, while yours was but passive acceptance." The Lord then sent a revelation which reminded them that He, Allah, is the most Merciful of those that show mercy, the most Generous of the generous. He had ransomed them both by sending the heavenly ram, freeing one of them from the obligation of slaughtering his own son, the other from surrendering his soul to the knife. At the same time He taught them that Ibrāhīm's ﷺ claim to generosity was the more justified, for the moment of death is endured only once, but the pain of having slaughtered his own son would have lasted and burned on in his heart until the day he died.

According to one account the reason for Ibrāhīm's trial was this: one day guests came to Ibrāhīm's house, and it was always his custom to slaughter an animal in honour of his guests. This time he had no sheep or goats, but he had a cow that had just calved. As Ibrāhīm ﷺ had nothing else to set before his guests, he took the newly born calf and slaughtered it in front of the eyes of its mother, paying no heed to the tears and cries of the mother cow. Therefore he was tried by the command to sacrifice his own son, and to feel the pain of this action.

According to another account, Ibrāhīm ﷺ once prayed against a group of extremely wicked and headstrong people, and they perished by the Command of the Almighty. When Ibrāhīm ﷺ was ready to carry out the sacrifice of Ismā'īl ﷺ, a cloud of smoke issued from his mouth, as a sign of his burning heart. The Lord addressed him then, "O Ibrāhīm, your heart is burning and wasted by pity for your cherished son whom I

have ordered you to sacrifice; do you not think that He who has created and given life to His servants feels pain and pity whenever He destroys them? From this time on I forbid you to ever pray against any creature whom I have created."

However the case may have been, no person has ever been tested by the Lord in such a way, and had Ibrāhīm's heart not been full of faith in the Lord, he could not have borne such a trial.

Thereafter Ibrāhīm ﷺ and his son Ismā'īl ﷺ went home in great joy and gratitude. Ismā'īl ﷺ returned to his mother Hājar in Mecca and Ibrāhīm ﷺ to his wife Sāra in Jerusalem. Ismā'īl ﷺ grew up and got married to the daughter of the chief of the tribe living with them in Mecca, but she was not a suitable match for him. One day the prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ came to visit his wife Hājar and continued on to the house where Ismā'īl ﷺ lived with his wife. Still he kept his promise to Sāra not to dismount from his camel on these visits Ismā'īl ﷺ was not at home when he came to the house, but a young woman answered the door. Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked about his son Ismā'īl. "Oh, he is not here,",she said, "he spends all day out in the mountains and the desert."

"Have you anything in the house to eat or drink?" asked the traveller. "What do you think, what kind of food should we have in a place like this? We barely have enough for ourselves," she said in a rough tone of voice. Ibrāhīm ﷺ made ready to leave, and said to her, "Tell Ismā'īl when he returns that his father called, and this is his message: he approves of his house, but the threshold is not good, he should change it."

With that he left her. Ismā'īl ﷺ however perceived his father's light from the distant mountains as he was departing. He ran down from there and arrived at his house. He could tell the traces of Ibrāhīm's light and he asked his wife, "Who has been here?" "An old man came to the door and asked for food and drink." "What did you say to him?" "I told him that you were out and that we have barely enough for ourselves in the house." "And what did he say when he left you?" "Oh, I had nearly forgotten, he spoke strange words; he said I should tell you that your house is very good, but that its threshold needs replacing.

I don't know what he meant." "I know what he meant," said Ismā'īl ﷺ, "my father is telling me that you are not to be my wife, and that I should send you away." So Ismā'īl ﷺ divorced this wife and married another girl after that.

The next year Ibrāhīm ﷺ came again to visit Ismā'īl ﷺ. Again he found him not at home, but a lovely young woman was outside the house. "Who are you?" he asked her. "I am the wife of Ismā'īl ﷺ," she answered politely. "And how are you today?" he said. "*Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, praised be the Almighty, we are doing very well." "Have you to eat and drink in your house?" "O father," she said, "the Lord has provided for everything we need in the middle of this desert." "I am hungry," said the traveller, "bring me something to eat." "Will you not dismount, father? It will be more comfortable for you. Let me seat you in the shade of the house and wash your head and feet from the dust of the journey." "No," he said, "I am bound by my word, I must not touch the ground here with my feet."

So she brought out to him all she had in the house on a tray and held it up to Ibrāhīm ﷺ sitting on his camel. He ate a mouthful of everything she had brought, and prayed over the food. When he had finished eating, she said, "O father, let me bring water to wash your hands and face." "I must not set foot upon this earth," replied Ibrāhīm ﷺ. "Step on this stone and I shall pour water over your head so that it might refresh you," said the young woman. So Ibrāhīm ﷺ put his foot upon the stone, and to this day the footprint of Ibrāhīm ﷺ can be seen on the stone called the *ḥajar Ibrāhīm*, the stone of Ibrāhīm, by the Ka'ba. There she washed his hands and face for him and as he was leaving her he said, "Give my *salāms* to your husband Ismā'īl, and tell him that his house is very good, and that his threshold is even better. Allah's blessings be upon you, my daughter." With these words he left her.

Ismā'īl ﷺ again saw his father's light departing from his house as he rushed down the mountain to meet him. But he was gone by the time he reached his house. Yet he perceived his light and smelt his father's presence and he asked his wife what had transpired. She told him about the meeting, about how she

had served him food and washed his hands and face, and she showed him his father's footprint upon the stone. She reported also his father's parting words to Ismā'īl. Ismā'īl ﷺ understood that his father had approved of his bride, and he informed her that she would become the grandmother of the prophet of the last times, for no woman can be a link in the lineage of a prophet except that she be of good character. "My father gave me good tidings about you," he said, "and tells me to keep you and never leave you." And she was very happy and they rejoiced in one another.

20 — THE BIRTH OF ISḤĀQ ﷺ

IBRĀHĪM ﷺ was now 100 years old and his wife Sāra around 80, and they had had no children of their own. One day he saw three or four young men coming towards his house, and he greeted and honoured them as his guests. He presented them with a roasted calf, but when he set it before them they would not touch the food. He wondered at this and spoke to them, "Why do you not eat, my brothers, we have not met before, and there is no enmity between us." For it has been the custom since time began that men who share bread and salt with each other may do each other no harm. Ibrāhīm ﷺ then conceived a fear of his guests such as he had not felt before. They revealed themselves to him and said, "Know, O Ibrāhīm, that we are not men but angels, and we do not partake of the food you mortals eat. We have come to you as messengers of your Lord, and we announce to you the birth of a son, Isḥāq." Sāra heard their speech from behind her curtain and she laughed aloud, for she was an old woman, and past the age of child-bearing. As it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Our messengers came to Ibrāhīm with the good tidings; they said, 'Peace!' 'Peace!' he said, and presently he brought a roasted calf.*

And when he saw their hands not reaching towards it he was suspicious of them and conceived a fear of them. They said, 'Fear not; we have been sent to the people of Lūṭ.'

And his wife was standing by; she laughed; therefore We gave her the glad tidings of Isḥāq, and after Isḥāq, of Ya'qūb. She said, 'Woe is me! Shall I bear, being an old woman, and this my husband is an old man? This assuredly is a strange thing!'

They said, 'What, doest thou marvel at Allah's command? The mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, O people of the House! Surely He is All-laudable, All-glorious.'" [Hūd, 11:69–73]

The Will of Allah was done, and Sāra conceived in spite of her age and gave birth to her son Isḥāq, and their hearts were gladdened. But the unbelieving people they lived amongst pointed at them and mocked, and said, "Look at these silly old people, all their lives they have had no children, and now, when they are old, they want to make believe that they have had a child! They picked up an orphan by the roadside and pretend he is their own son ..." And they ridiculed Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and Sāra.

But his parents raised Isḥāq lovingly and gave him the best care, and he grew to be comely and strong. He resembled his father Ibrāhīm عليه السلام so much that the two were indistinguishable, and people could not tell them apart; this led to any number of confusions and small problems. One day Ibrāhīm عليه السلام prayed to the Lord that He might set a distinguishing mark between him and his son, and the Lord heard his prayer. When he awoke the next day and looked into the mirror, he noticed a few white hairs in his beard. Up until this time this sign of ageing had not occurred among men. He was alarmed and asked the Lord what this meant, and the angel brought him a message, "These white hairs in your beard signify dignity and honour, O Ibrāhīm!" Then Ibrāhīm عليه السلام prayed and said, "O Lord, give me more of this dignity and honour!" The next day he awoke and found that his beard and the hair on his head had all turned a snowy white. From now on, no one had any more difficulty in telling father from son.

21 — THE BUILDING OF THE KA'BA

ONE DAY IBRĀHĪM ﷺ received the Command from his Lord to rebuild the *baytu llāh*, the House of the Lord in the place where the *baytu l-ma'mūr* had once stood on earth. He and Ismā'īl were to complete the task, but they knew not the exact spot where it had stood. How was Ibrāhīm ﷺ to find the place in the midst of all the sands of the desert? When the Lord commanded him to erect the Ka'ba, He sent the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ who pointed to the spot with the tip of his wing, and a cloud hovered above. From the cloud fell a gentle rain, the rain of Mercy, as if to cleanse the earth where this holy shrine was to be rebuilt. When the flood of Nūḥ ﷺ was about to be unleashed, the mountain of Abū Qubays spoke up and said, "O Lord, entrust the Black Stone to me, I will look after it as if it were my own soul." So the Black Stone was given to Mt. Abū Qubays as a trust, and it was the only part of the *baytu l-ma'mūr* left on earth during the flood. Mt. Abū Qubays is a mountain overlooking the *ḥaram*, the sacred precinct of Mecca, and it hid the stone within itself.

When Ibrāhīm ﷺ wished to begin building the Ka'ba, Jibrā'īl ﷺ was sent to fetch the stone. The mountain cried and complained to the Lord and was loath to give up its treasure. But Jibrā'īl ﷺ took it from it and they incorporated it in their building. They made the mortar with water from the Zamzam well, and they worked until they had roofed the building. Then they sat down to rest awhile, and had yet to clean away the rubble left from the work and to sweep the holy precincts, when suddenly there arose a strong wind, like a cyclone, which carried away all the left-over building materials, all the mud, straw and stone lying about the building site. These bits were blown up into the skies and distributed all over the earth. Wherever any of these pieces landed, a large or small mosque was later built, depending on the size of the debris that fell on it. This is why all the mosques in the world are called *baytu llāh*, which means House of Allah, after the original *baytu llāh*, the Ka'ba.

Ibrāhīm ﷺ then taught the people there all the rites of the pilgrimage, the Ḥajj, as it had been revealed to him. He taught them to perform the *ṭawāf*, the sevenfold circumambulation of the Ka'ba, and the *sā'i*, the running between the hills of Ṣafā and Marwa, commemorating Hājar's search for water between these hills. They stood at 'Arafat where Ādam ﷺ had been reunited with Ḥawwā' , and they collected stones from the plain of Muzdalifa. Then they went on to Mina and threw the stones at three pillars representing Shayṭān, as Ismā'īl ﷺ had actually stoned the accursed one in that place. To this very day pilgrims perform these same rites, as they were taught by our father Ibrāhīm ﷺ.

After the Ḥajj was completed Ibrāhīm ﷺ returned to his own country, and Ismā'īl ﷺ remained at Mecca. Ibrāhīm ﷺ travelled northwards and looked out over the land from the top of mountain, towards the lands of Syria and Palestine, and he saw a vision of green and watered fields, palm groves and pleasant gardens, and he prayed to the Lord,

"And when Ibrāhīm said, 'My Lord, make this a land secure, and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day ...'" [The Cow, 2:126]

Thus Ibrāhīm ﷺ prayed for his progeny to be blessed and to be amply provided for.

"And when Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl with him raised up the foundations of the House: 'Our Lord, receive this from us; Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing; and, our Lord, make us submissive to Thee, and of our seed a nation submissive to Thee; and show us our holy rites, and turn towards us; Surely Thou turnest, and art All-Compassionate.'" [The Cow, 2:127–128]

A year later Ibrāhīm ﷺ returned with his wife Sāra and Isḥāq ﷺ, and together with Hājar and Ismā'īl ﷺ they all performed the Ḥajj.

At the Ka'ba they rested and prayed, and all of them prayed for the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ. Ibrāhīm ﷺ prayed for the old among that nation, Ismā'īl ﷺ interceded for those of middle-age. Isḥāq ﷺ prayed for the young, Sāra for the free-born women, and Hājar for the slaves and servants. The Lord ac-

cepted all their prayers. Then Ibrāhīm ﷺ said to the Lord, "O Lord, my whole family and I love the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ, because their Prophet is beloved to You. I have heard that his Nation will be constantly engaged in *ṣalawāt,* reciting prayers and blessings on him. But between my time and theirs there is a great interval, and many prophets will appear during that time. I wish that they would include me too in their prayers." And the Lord granted him his prayer and gave him good tidings, saying, "I will grant them the five daily prayers at the end of which they will recite a special prayer for you and your house, O Ibrāhīm. This prayer will be known as the *ṣalātu l-Ibrāhīmiyya,* the prayer for Ibrāhīm ﷺ.

The *ṣalātu l-Ibrāhīmiyya* is recited at the end of each of the five ritual prayers, just before giving *salāms*: "O Allah, send grace on Muḥammad and the House of Muḥammad, as Thou hast sent grace upon Ibrāhīm and the House of Ibrāhīm, verily Thou art worthy of all praise, full of glory. O Allah, send blessings on Muḥammad and the House of Muḥammad, as Thou hast sent blessings upon Ibrāhīm and the House of Ibrāhīm, verily Thou art worthy of all praise, full of glory."

All prophets have prayed this prayer for Ibrāhīm ﷺ and his house, because of his great love for the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ and its prophet, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ. Then Ibrāhīm ﷺ was well pleased and happy.

"*And when We settled for Ibrāhīm the place of the House: 'Thou shalt not associate with Me anything. And do thou purify My House for those that shall go about it and those that stand, for those that bow and prostrate themselves, and proclaim among men the Hajj, and they shall come unto thee on foot and upon every lean beast, they shall come from every deep ravine that they may witness things profitable to them and mention Allah's Name on days well-known over such beasts of the flocks as He has provided them:*

'So eat thereof, and feed the wretched poor.'

'Let them finish with their self-neglect and let them fulfill their vows, and go about the Ancient House.'

All that; and whosoever venerates the sacred things of Allah, it shall be better for him with his Lord. And permitted to you are the flocks, except

that which is recited to you. And eschew the abomination of idols, and eschew the speaking of falsehood.'" [The Pilgrimage, 22:26–30]

When the Divine Command came for Ibrāhīm ﷺ to call all men to the Hajj, he did so from a high mountain. In answer there arose a great humming in the air, like the humming of many bees, and millions of voices mingled saying, "*Labayk, Allāhumma, labayk! Labayk lā sharīka laka labayk. Inna l-ḥamda wa n-niʿmata laka wa l-mulk, lā sharīka lak.*" (This is pilgrims' call during the days of the Ḥajj. Roughly translated it means: "Here we are in Your Presence, O Lord; Your Presence which knows no partner. To You belongs all praise, to You all grace, and to You all sovereignty; You have no partner.") These were the voices of the souls from the unseen world. Whoever spoke these words once, will perform one Ḥajj, whoever spoke them twice, will go on Ḥajj twice, and whoever pronounced them twenty times will perform Ḥajj twenty times, each according to what is written for him.

Ibrāhīm ﷺ heard all these voices, and since he was a model of hospitality and loved all guests, he looked around for something to present to all these answering voices. Jibrāʾīl ﷺ came to him and said, "These are the voices of the souls in the unseen world, they are not yet here in this world, they are yet as seeds in the world of spirits. The Lord sends you this water that you may treat them all to something, sprinkle it about you and behold the wisdom of the Lord." Ibrāhīm ﷺ did so, and the wind carried tiny drops of water everywhere. The drops that fell upon the seas became the salt of the seas, those that fell upon dry land became the salt of the earth. This was the banquet that Ibrāhīm ﷺ gave that day to all men who are to come until the Day of Gathering.

Ibrāhīm ﷺ returned to his house. Hājar meanwhile passed away at Mecca where she is buried, may Allah have mercy on her soul.

22 — THE HOSPITALITY OF IBRĀHĪM KHALĪL ﷺ

IBRĀHĪM ﷺ was very, very fond of entertaining guests. For this purpose he kept large flocks of sheep and herds of goats. The four archangels, Jibrā'īl ﷺ, Mīkā'īl ﷺ, Isrāfīl ﷺ and 'Azrā'īl ﷺ came to the Lord and said, "O Lord, the Prophet Ibrāhīm, *Khalīlu r-Raḥmān*, the Close Friend of the Merciful, whom You call Your special friend, has strayed from the path of being Your chosen intimate; he has become absorbed in the affairs of the world, he hoards possessions and loves his material goods." The Lord answered and spoke, "O My Angels, My Friend is My Own; as much as he may have worldly possessions, his heart is always with Me." For Ibrāhīm ﷺ had at that time become very wealthy and his herds were very great. He kept 4000 dogs to herd his sheep, and each dog had a collar and a chain made of gold. For this reason the angels believed that Ibrāhīm ﷺ had fallen in love with the *dunyā*, this lower world. They begged permission of the Lord to test him, and the Lord granted them leave to go and do so, but He told them, "Ibrāhīm's heart is always with Me, there is not a grain of worldliness in it. He knows that all he possesses is a gift from Me, and he spends it for My sake alone."

The four angels then descended and came to Ibrāhīm ﷺ as his guests. No sooner had they entered than Ibrāhīm ﷺ slaughtered a heifer for them and prepared it for them. But since angels do not partake of earthly food, they did not touch it. Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked them, "Why do you not eat of my food? There is no enmity between us, surely." "We do not know you, and you do not know us," replied the angels, "we will not eat until you have named the price." Ibrāhīm ﷺ said, "The only price on this meal is that you begin it by saying these words: *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm.*"

Now, the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ had a wonderfully beautiful voice. He recited these words: *Subbūhu l-quddūs, rabbunā wa rabbu l-malā'ikati wa r-rūḥ*, meaning: praised be the All-Holy, our Lord, the Lord of the angels and the spirit. Ibrāhīm ﷺ became

nearly ecstatic from the beauty of these holy words and exclaimed, "*Lā ilāha illā llāh!* Please, my friend, say this again." The angel said, "Only for a price." "State your price then," said Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "I will give you whatever I possess, all my flocks, my shepherds and sheep-dogs, including their golden chains, if you will only repeat once more these words which you have just spoken." So Jibrā'īl ﷺ intoned a second time: *Subbūhu l-quddūs, rabbunā wa rabbu l-malā'ikati wa r-rūḥ ...*

This time his voice sounded even more beautiful than the first time, and Ibrāhīm ﷺ nearly swooned. "Ah," he said "please repeat this yet a third time ..." The angel replied, "Everything has its price. What will you give me for this?" "Take my house and all that is in it, take all you see, it shall be yours, just please repeat these words again and again ..." In the end, Ibrāhīm ﷺ had made over all he owned to his guests, even his own person and his household to be their slaves and servants, and the angels could not help but be impressed with his generosity.

Jibrā'īl ﷺ recited these words one more time, and Ibrāhīm ﷺ sighed and said, "That is it, I have nothing more to give you all I had is now yours." The angels then revealed themselves to Ibrāhīm ﷺ, blessed him and praised him and said, "We came to test you and to learn whether your heart is truly always with your Lord; you have passed the test and gone far beyond it. You are truly the Friend of Allah, may His Blessings be upon you and your house forever, O Khalīl." "By the Grace of God it may be so, but take with you now your belongings that I have given you, I cannot take them back." "But we are angels," they said, "what are we to do with your worldly goods?" "Do whatever you would with them. I cannot take back what I have given in the Presence of the Lord." The angels knew not what to do and they asked the Lord. "How shall we deal with Your prophet, O Lord?" The Lord said: "Arrange it with him thus: all his goods shall belong to Allah Almighty, he is but their caretaker," and so they did, by the Command of the Almighty Lord, Allah.

The prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ loved guests so much that his house had not one door but four, because he liked to admit his guests

from all four sides, and so he could see them coming from afar. Surrounding his guest quarters there were kitchens and rooms for preparing food, and there were waiting rooms for guests in case there were too many to be served all at once. There was a standing invitation to eat from the table of Ibrāhīm Khalīlullāh, and it was an honour and a blessing to be made his guest. Whoever loves guests and rejoices in hospitality will be raised under the banner of Ibrāhīm ﷺ on the Day of Judgement.

One day a person came to be Ibrāhīm's guest. He was unkempt and dirty, his nails were long, his hair matted, his beard and mustache intertwined, so that he presented an altogether disreputable appearance. But he came as a guest and he wished to spend the night as well. Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked of him, "What do you worship?" "I worship the fire," said the guest who was a Majūsī, a fire worshipper. "That is a great mistake," Ibrāhīm ﷺ told him, "for it is Allah Almighty who has created the Universe. He has also created the fire, and nothing is worthy of worship except the Creator. You must correct your beliefs and say: *lā ilāha illā llāh, Ibrāhīm rasūlullāh.*" And he argued with him. Then he served him his food, but he did not eat with him, for he felt repulsion, and he prepared a separate room for him and did not keep him company.

In the morning he rose and went to see what had become of his guest, but he found him gone. He asked his people where the man had gone, but nobody had seen him leave. Then Ibrāhīm ﷺ heard a call from his Lord, saying, "O Ibrāhīm, it is I who created that man, and I who have provided for him and apportioned his sustenance. I did not require him to believe in Me in return for these gifts, while you, in exchange for one night's food and shelter ask him to renounce all he has believed along his whole life, and to accept your religion as a price for your hospitality. If you do not make up with him and make him pleased, your work is not well done!"

Ibrāhīm ﷺ was shaken by this reprimand from the Lord of the Worlds, and he set out to look for the man. He followed him for ten days before he caught up with him. The man was walking down the road, looking unhappy and crestfallen, crying to

himself, "All people are the guests of Ibrāhīm Khalīl, only I did not receive his proverbial hospitality. How can he treat me thus, when He who created me and provided for me does not turn me from His door or deny me my share! Alas, Ibrāhīm ﷺ would not suffer my company." Ibrāhīm ﷺ heard his speech, caught up with him and said, "O Guest of God, please come back with me and be my guest. I have been on the road for ten days now searching for you, in order to make up the wrong I did you." "How should I return and go back to a place where I was not made welcome? I will not go with you." Ibrāhīm ﷺ tried to convince him for a long time and finally he picked him up and carried him all the way home on his back. For ten days he carried him and when they arrived at his house, Ibrāhīm ﷺ fell down on the ground, blood streaming from his nose and mouth. He smiled then and was glad.

The fire-worshipper asked him, "Why have you brought me here with such difficulty, when you could hardly bear my company the first time I came to your door?" "My Lord has reprimanded me on your account," said Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "for that I did not treat you well even though He has created you and provides for you, regardless of whether you believe in Him or not." The other man said, "Your Lord, the Creator of all things, has censured you who are a prophet and His Friend, because of one fire-worshipper whom you tried to wean off his beliefs?" "My Lord is Generous. He is the most Merciful of those that show Mercy, and He loves that one should respect all the people He has created, for we are all His servants." Thereupon the fire-worshipper said, "Ah, I have worshipped the fire for sixty long years, and yet it shows me no mercy, it burns me just the same as it has always done. If your Lord has such Love for His creatures, I will now bear witness that there is no god but Allah Almighty, and that you, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, are His prophet." So he became a Muslim, and he was the best of Muslims from that time on.

Ibrāhīm ﷺ was the best of hosts, he used to thank his guests for coming to his house and honouring him with their visit, and as they left him he used to give them a present. He would say, "Had the Lord not sent you here to me, I would have had to

go out and seek you in order to give you your portion of sustenance which the Lord has placed in my charge. That would have been very difficult for me, so I thank you for coming to my house and making my task easy, may Allah reward you for your good service and the good you have done by me." People would come to him from all parts of the world and from all tribes and nations. And Ibrāhīm ﷺ would not sit down to eat if he had no guest; if perchance no one came, he would go out and look for one.

One day Ibrāhīm ﷺ was out on the road, and he passed by an orchard. He happened to be very thirsty and had no water with him. He saw there a man, a black slave, who was pasturing his camels. Allah does not look at the colour of your face, He looks only at your heart. Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked him. "Have you any water for me?" The man asked, "Do you want water or milk, O Khalīlullāh?" "Water," replied Ibrāhīm ﷺ, for his thirst was great. The black man then struck the ground with his foot, and there sprang up, a well of water, sweet and refreshing. Ibrāhīm ﷺ drank his fill, thanked the man and praised the Lord, and left this place wondering to himself, "O Lord, what miracle powers you have given to that servant of Yours!" The Lord answered him, saying, "O Ibrāhīm, the heart of that servant is wholly for Me, he has no other thoughts in it than of Me, Almighty; and have I not said, 'Be as I wish you to be, and I will be as you wish for Me to be'?"

If a servant places his will entirely in the Will of the Almighty, Allah will grant him all he asks for, He will be just as the servant wishes. Once there was a scholar who was very proud of his knowledge. He was travelling along the road when he met a poor man going to market with a load of wood upon his back to sell in town for a few pennies. The man was very poor and dressed in rags that barely covered him. The scholar asked him, "Are you a Muslim, or do you belong to another faith?" The poor man let his load slide off his back and said, "May it turn into gold, by leave of Allah Almighty!" Instantly all the wood turned into gold. He looked at the dumbfounded scholar, and after a bit he said, "Now turn into wood again!" and all the

gold turned back into wood, and he loaded it onto his back. Still the scholar did not understand, for although his mind was very learned, his heart was not versed in Divine Knowledge. So he said to the man, "O peasant, I have never seen anyone more foolish than you. Had you kept only one little twig of that gold, you could have led a life free of toil and trouble with no more cares; truly, can there be greater ignorance than this?" As he left to go, the poor man turned back glancing at the scholar, and said, "If I thought as you do, the wood would have always remained wood and never turned into gold at all ..."

The prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ was in the habit of fasting and he would not eat unless he had a guest. If no one came, he would break his fast only with water and make intention for the next day's fast. Once it was three days before the Lord sent him a guest with whom to break his fast. The next day the Command of the Lord came to Ibrāhīm ﷺ to go out into the world and see its wonders. Fasting as he was, Ibrāhīm ﷺ set out along the road, After a time he came to a dwelling where a servant of the Lord lived in the branches of a big tree. In front of him grew a small tree of pomegranates. Ibrāhīm ﷺ saluted him and he returned his greetings. "O 'Abdullāh, servant of Allah," said Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "today I am your guest." "Welcome to you, O Guest of God, are you fasting?" "Yes, I am," answered the prophet. They sat together until the sun set, prayed together, then the man went and picked two pomegranates off the tree, one for himself and one for his guest. They broke their fast and intended the fast of the next day. His host said, "*Al-ḥamdu li-llāh* that Allah has sent me a guest to break my fast with." Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked him, "How often do you break your fast? Every night?" "No," he replied, "every month if Allah sends me a guest." "And what if no guest comes to your door?" "Then I intend another month's fasting." Ibrāhīm ﷺ was very surprised to hear this, for he had grown a little proud of himself, and now he had met one who outdid him and who was not even a prophet, just an ordinary servant of the Lord, a purified one. He asked him, "Are there others like you living in these parts?" "Yes," answered the ascetic, "there is one whom you will meet if you go to such-and-such a place."

The next day Ibrāhīm ﷺ set out to look for that man, and he found him dwelling in a small cave, ceaselessly engaged in the worship of his Lord. He had turned completely from the affairs of the world, possessed nothing, had no family and worshipped day and night. Ibrāhīm ﷺ saluted him and announced himself as his guest for the night. The man bade him welcome to stay with him. Ibrāhīm ﷺ looked around, but he saw no sign of anything edible nor anything that had to do with the preparation of food. There were no mats or rugs in that cave, they sat on the bare ground, occupied in their devotions. At sundown Ibrāhīm ﷺ began to wonder what he would be served that evening. After they had prayed together, he saw a gazelle appear before them. The man just pointed at it, and it fell to the ground, slaughtered and skinned, partly cooked, partly roasted. They sat down to the meal and their plates were made of the skin of the gazelle. When they had eaten their fill, the dervish wrapped up the remains of the deer in its skin and said, "Rise, by leave of the Almighty Creator!" The gazelle was miraculously restored to life and its form made complete again, it leapt off into the woods and disappeared from their view. "*Al-ḥamdu li-llāh* that Allah has sent me a guest with whom to break my fast," he said. "How often do you break your fast then?" asked Ibrāhīm ﷺ in wonder. "Once every two months, if Allah graces me with a guest," he replied. "If no guest comes, I break my fast with water every night and intend to fast for another two months." Ibrāhīm ﷺ wondered even more at this and asked if there were any more like him living in this land of ascetics. "Yes, there is one who lives on the mountains of Lebanon, and he is more advanced than any."

So Ibrāhīm ﷺ sought out that man on the mountain. He met a person there who was dressed in the best clothes and was scented with the most precious perfume, wearing a fresh, clean turban. He was by far the best-looking person Ibrāhīm ﷺ had seen on his journey. After giving *salāms*, Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked to be his guest for the night, whereupon the man bade him welcome and led him into his cave. This cave was a marvel to behold, it was all bedecked with green carpets, its walls were covered with

soft green draperies, and it was clean and more peaceful than any mosque Ibrāhīm ﷺ had every seen. "This is your house?" asked Ibrāhīm ﷺ. "No," answered the man, "this is a House of Allah, it is a mosque."

Soon it was sundown and they prayed together. Again Ibrāhīm ﷺ wondered where their food would come from, since he could detect no sign of its preparation. After the prayer, they sat down together in the middle of the mosque, and his host made a supplication to the Lord, saying, "My Lord, a guest has come to me for Your sake, be pleased to send us somewhat of Your bounties so we may eat." When he had spoken these words, the roof of the mosque opened up and a tray descended from the ceiling, upon which were heaped all sorts of delicacies, soups, dishes of meat and pastries, sweet meats and fruits, and Ibrāhīm ﷺ had never tasted anything better than this food. When they had eaten their fill and given thanks to the Giver of Bounties, his host thanked Ibrāhīm ﷺ for being his guest. Then the tray rose up again towards the roof of the cave and disappeared through it and no trace remained. "O servant of the Lord, how often do you break your fast?" asked Ibrāhīm ﷺ. "Every three months," answered the man, "if Allah sends me a guest."

Ibrāhīm ﷺ was astonished, and asked the man to show him his house, for the splendour of the mosque had made him curious to see what the man's house might be like. "My house is not here," he told him, "my home is situated on a small island, but I spend most of my time here in the mosque at prayer." Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked again to go to the man's own house, but the man said, "O Guest of God next to this cave there is a second smaller one. Go into that cave first, and come back. Thereafter we may go."

Ibrāhīm ﷺ went into the second cave where he encountered a frightful tiger, great and ferocious. The tiger roared so that it shook the mountains of Lebanon, and his voice echoed all around. Ibrāhīm ﷺ, unabashed, stamped his foot on the ground and yelled back at the tiger, "Be quiet, O hound of Allah, you are in the presence of the Friend of God, Khalīlullāh!" The tiger then made not another sound, but curled up at his feet and

went to sleep. Ibrāhīm ﷺ returned to the first cave and his host said, "It is alright." This meant that Ibrāhīm ﷺ had passed a test, for had his heart been other than completely pure, the tiger would have attacked him and eaten him up.

His host now had him climb upon his back and close his eyes, and when he allowed him to open them again, they had arrived. They travelled only for an instant, but they had covered a distance as far as east is from west. This way of travelling is known only to those to whom Allah grants powers from His Powers, and it is a secret. So they arrived on the island and Ibrāhīm ﷺ looked about. He saw a small place marked out for prayer with pebbles, an old straw mat, an earthenware jug and some smaller jugs containing oil and wicks for lamps. The man said, "Here you see all my belongings." "This is all?" asked Ibrāhīm. "Yes, and it is even more than I need, in any case. But sometimes the ground is cold, so I use the mat for praying, and the night is sometimes very dark, so I have some light from the lamps, and the jug I use for my ablutions whenever I am unable to go down to the sea. Since I only break my fast every three months, if there is a guest, I need no more than this."

Ibrāhīm ﷺ then spoke, "O most excellent servant of Allah! Pray for me, for your prayer is surely acceptable in the eyes of the Lord!" The man wept and said, "O Guest of God, it is not so, the Lord does not answer my prayer." "How is that, O worthy one?" "For forty years now I have been praying to the Lord to grant me one thing, and He does not grant it to me. You must ask another more worthy than I to pray for you." "What is it you have been praying for forty years?" asked Ibrāhīm ﷺ.

"Once when I was travelling in concealment across the mountains and seas, I beheld a young man by the shores of the sea. His hair was long, it reached down below his knees and upon his face there was a light such as I had never seen in all my life. I stopped with him and greeted him, then I saw that he was weeping and his tears fell upon the waters of the sea. I said to him, 'It befits not such eyes as yours to weep, what is the occasion for all your grief?' 'I am weeping out of longing for my father whom I miss so very much,' he said. 'And who is your

father for whom you weep so bitterly?' 'My father is Ibrāhīm, Khalīlullāh, the prophet of our times.'"

"From that time onwards a great longing arose in me to see the Friend of God, Khalīlullāh. This yearning has not left me for forty years, nor has my Lord granted me my wish. Now I am old and I pray yet that I may see and embrace only once that blessed one who is called Khalīlullāh, then I will gladly leave this world and go to my eternal resting place."

Ibrāhīm ﷺ then said to him, "Good tidings to you, my friend, he whom you have sought is before you, I am Khalīlullāh, the Lord has sent me to you, and He has fulfilled your heart's desire." They embraced, and after they had embraced that saint surrendered his soul in Ibrāhīm's lap. They were both lovers of God, their souls had loved each other from pre-eternity and great was their rejoicing at having met again. Ibrāhīm ﷺ was happy that he had met that friend and sad that he could not spend more time in his company, but everything is according to the will of the Lord. He washed his body and prayed the funeral prayer over him, then he buried him in the garment he had been wearing. In the place where he used to pray he placed a headstone to mark the grave.

He remained for a while in meditation on the island, then he grew lonely for his family, and prayed to the Lord, "O Allah, I do miss my son, how shall I see him again?" The Lord sent an angel who said, "I will take you wherever you wish to go." So Ibrāhīm ﷺ let the angel carry him away.

In the blinking of an eye he had arrived at a place nobody else had ever been before him. There he saw a gate which extended from the East to the West. There seemed to be no beginning and no end to that gate. Along its whole length it was beautifully worked in gold and silver, inlaid with diamonds and pearls and other precious gems. And he saw that the gate was wide open. "What gate is this?" he asked the angel he was travelling with. "This is the gate of repentance," said he, "it will remain open until the sun rises in the West." "When does the sun ever rise in the West?" wondered Ibrāhīm ﷺ. "There will be a time when the sun rises in the West," insisted the angel, "then

the gate of repentance will be shut, and the End will be near." And the angel went on to say, "Remember the time you were with Nimrūd, and you said to him, 'My Lord is He who created you and me, and He is the Giver of life and death.' Nimrūd then said, 'I, too, give life and death.' Then you said, 'My Lord brings the sun from the East, do you bring it from the West,' and Nimrūd was perplexed and knew not what to answer. But your Lord has heard and recorded all these sayings, and He swore by His Majesty that the Day of Judgement should not dawn until the sun has risen in the West. 'For the sake of My Friend,' He says, 'who has affirmed that his Lord is powerful to do all things'. Until that time the gate of repentance will remain open. In the last days the sun will not rise for three days; for three days it will not rise at all, and those who are awake at the time of the *tahajjud* prayer before the dawn will wait and wonder how long it is until the dawn on that day. They will think that maybe they are mistaken. Not a cock's crow nor any bird's voice will announce the dawn until three days have passed. And the pious who are awake at night, engaged in devotion, will know that it is the time of the closing of the gate of repentance. They will try to wake up their heedless brethren, but no one will awake who is not already wakeful, all will be asleep as if they were dead. During these three days the gate of repentance is closing, and those who know will weep and pray and beseech the Lord to have mercy. After those three days, the sun will rise in the West, and the time for repentance will be past."

So spoke the angel. Then he flew Ibrāhīm ﷺ to the Ka'ba where he visited his son Ismā'īl ﷺ, made *ṭawāf* around the Ka'ba and returned to his land.

The Lord said to Ibrāhīm ﷺ, "O My Friend, I have made you rich and have given you a great many possessions; had I made you poor, how do you think you would fare?" "O Lord, I think that poverty would be worse than the fires of Nimrūd." And the Lord said, "By My Might and My Majesty, by My Glory and Sublimity, I have created no greater hardship between heaven and earth than poverty, it is the greatest trial of all."

Once the Angel of Death, 'Azrā'īl ﷺ, said to the Lord, "O Lord, whenever I come to take the souls of men, they are sad and distressed; once I would also like to go bringing glad tidings." And what good tidings would you bring them, O 'Azrā'īl?" "I would like to go to Your prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ and inform him that You have made him Your special Friend, Khalīl." "Go then and tell him," spoke the Lord.

The angel went to Ibrāhīm's house, but he was not in. So 'Azrā'īl ﷺ assumed the form of a most pleasant visitor, entered the house and sat down to wait. Ibrāhīm ﷺ came home, remarked the guest and said, "Who are you? Who let you into the house?" "The Lord of this house," said the angel, and Ibrāhīm ﷺ then knew it was 'Azrā'īl ﷺ who had come to see him. "What have you come for? Have you come to take my soul?" "No, this one time I have come with a message that will make you glad." "What is your message, O 'Azrā'īl?" "I have come to tell you that the Lord of the Worlds has made you His chosen Friend, you are now Khalīlullāh." "And by what sign may I know that He has honoured me with His Friendship?" asked Ibrāhīm ﷺ. "Whatever you ask of Him, He will grant it to you." Looking at 'Azrā'īl, the angel of Death, Ibrāhīm ﷺ said, "I want to see how the dead are revived." As it is told in the Holy Qur'ān:

"And when Ibrāhīm said, 'My Lord, show me how Thou wilt give life to the dead,' He said, 'Why, dost thou not believe?'

'Yes,' he said, 'but that my heart may be at rest.' Said He, 'Take four birds, and twist them to thee, then set a part of them on every hill, then summon them, and they will come to thee running; And do thou know that Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.'" [The Cow, 2:260]

So he took four different birds: a peacock, a crow, a dove and a rooster. He slaughtered them, plucked their feathers, cut up their flesh, and pounded it all together in a mortar, the heads alone he kept apart separately. Then he divided the mass into four different parts and took it to four different places upon the mountain, or to four different mountains far from each other. After this he returned to the house and called to the cock, "Come!" Upon his call, Allah Almighty caused a wind to blow from all four points of the compass, and the wind picked up all

the feathers and mixed up pieces of bird meat from the four places where Ibrāhīm ﷺ had placed them, and, *māshā'Allāh*, all the feathers and limbs sorted themselves out by the Grace of God, and the birds were restored to their proper shapes, except for their heads, which Ibrāhīm ﷺ held in his hand. But for the head, not a single feather was missing. Ibrāhīm ﷺ placed the birds' heads back in their places, and all the birds came back to life as they had been before. Ibrāhīm ﷺ then said, "O Lord, truly You have mastery over all things; life and death and revival of the dead are in Your Hands."

23 — THE DEATH OF IBRĀHĪM ﷺ

IBRĀHĪM ﷺ was now almost 200 years of age and he was still in possession of his health and strength and had no desire for death. Ibrāhīm ﷺ had requested of his Lord that He would not take his soul until he asked for death, and the Lord had granted His Friend that wish. One day Ibrāhīm ﷺ had been waiting a long time for a guest to come and share his evening meal with him. Finally he saw a very, very old man come tottering along the road. Ibrāhīm ﷺ helped him into his house, and they sat down to eat. But the old, old man did not know how to eat any more, he spilled food all over himself, it fell from his spoon and onto his lap, and his hand trembled so that he could not find his mouth. Ibrāhīm ﷺ felt very sorry for the old, old man and asked him how old he was. "I am 202 years old," answered his guest, and Ibrāhīm ﷺ thought to himself, "What if I become like him in two more years?" The man knew what he was thinking, and said, "Yes, of course you will become like me, it is only a question of time. When I was your age, I was just as fit as you are now, or even fitter." Ibrāhīm ﷺ then prayed, "O Lord, rather than continuing my life and becoming like this helpless old person, take my soul from me now, that I might return to You."

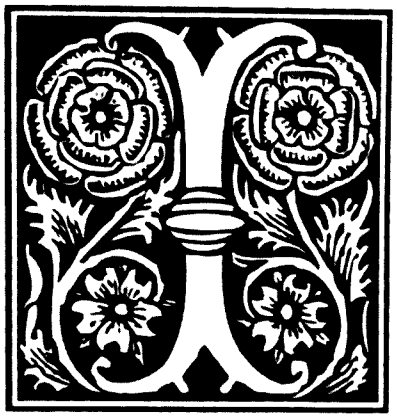
When he had finished his prayer, the old man suddenly changed his form and became the person Ibrāhīm ﷺ had seen

before, when the angel had come to him to give him the good tidings of Allah's Friendship. It was 'Azrā'īl ﷺ, and he said to him, "You have asked for death, O Khalīlullāh, I am here to give it to you." "You have come to take my soul? Upon whose orders?" "My Lord, Allah Almighty, has ordered me to return your soul to Him in answer to your prayer." "Ibrāhīm ﷺ still objected, "Does any friend wish to kill his friend?" And a call came from Allah Almighty, "Does a friend object to meeting his friend?" Ibrāhīm ﷺ heard and smiled at this. He said to 'Azrā'īl ﷺ, "Give me time to pray one last prayer." He stood to pray, and when he prostrated himself, the angel took from him his soul, gently, and set it free to fly through the heavenly gardens. The Lord asked Ibrāhīm's soul, "How did you find surrendering your self?" "O my Lord, the draught of death which I have now tasted was more bitter than the moment when Nimrūd hurled me into his fires, and it was also sweeter than the cup of water he gave me after a whole year's thirsting." "O my Friend," said the Lord Almighty, "never has 'Azrā'īl ﷺ taken a man's soul with such gentleness as he did when he took your soul. You felt nothing, but it is not so for all men. Only for the true believers will death be as gentle as it has been for you."

Between the prophets Nūḥ ﷺ and Ibrāhīm ﷺ there passed a space of 1000 years, some say 2140 years. Allah sent to Ibrāhīm ﷺ ten pages of heavenly scripture, and these are divided into ten chapters. The rules contained in them were obligatory for the nation of Ibrāhīm ﷺ and they are commended for the nation of Muḥammad ﷺ. Five rules concern the head, and five rules concern the body: rinsing of the mouth and rinsing of the nose when performing ritual ablutions; clipping of the mustache, the cutting short of the hair, and the use of a tooth-stick, a *miswāk*. Furthermore, circumcision, removal of underarm hair, cutting short the nails, cutting of pubic hair, and cleansing with water after using the toilet. Whoever adheres to these ten practices, completes the *sunna*, the exemplary practice of our noble prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, and the *sunna* of the prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ.

There are many more stories concerning Ibrāhīm Khalīl-ullāh, what we have related here is but one ray of that sun. The prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ is held in high esteem by every nation, and each claims him for their own nation and religion. But in truth he belonged to the true religion of Allah, and he will intercede on the Day of Judgment on behalf of all the children.

24 — LŪṬ عليه السلام



IN FORMER TIMES prophets were not sent to deliver their message to the whole of mankind, but only to a certain people, so that there were sometimes several prophets living at one time. Ibrāhīm's relative Lūṭ had set out with him when they emigrated from Nimrūd's kingdom, and he was a believer. One day Ibrāhīm عليه السلام perceived that Lūṭ's appearance had somehow changed, his face was filled with a special light and it shone like the moon. "You have changed, O Lūṭ," he said to him, "it looks as if you had become a prophet." "Yes, uncle," replied Lūṭ, "Jibrā'īl عليه السلام came and disclosed to me my prophethood, but he told me not where I am to go and deliver my message."

There were then three neighbouring cities along what is now called the Dead Sea, and Lūṭ عليه السلام was sent to these people, while Ibrāhīm عليه السلام continued on to Jerusalem. In the whole world there were no people more degraded than the inhabitants of the towns where Lūṭ عليه السلام was sent. They had gone entirely astray and they indulged perversity and abomination. Shayṭān the accursed had taught them evil ways, so that they no longer knew the meaning of the words modesty and shame. The men did not follow the ways of nature but consorted with young boys instead, and the greater his immorality, the more highly they esteemed a person. Such were the conditions in the towns that Lūṭ عليه السلام was sent to.

He lived among them for a long time and tried in vain to remedy their ways. He even married one of their women, Wa'īla, but his wife never was a believer. She opposed her husband in every way and constantly betrayed his trust and confidence. It was as if he had a spy in the house. Lūṭ عليه السلام had four daughters with her, he bought land and tilled the soil, and tried his best to fulfill the Divine Command to better that wayward people.

From time to time he visited his uncle Ibrāhīm ﷺ and shared his grief with him, and each time Ibrāhīm ﷺ counselled him, "Be patient, O Lūṭ, for the punishment of the Lord will not be long in coming." Lūṭ ﷺ returned to the people and would warn them of the evil consequences if they stuck to their corrupt ways. He told them of the destruction the Lord Almighty would visit on them and how they would stand as a sign and a warning of Allah's Wrath for all peoples and times to come. But they laughed at him, and ridiculed him, and made him look silly. The more earnestly he called them to mend their ways, the worse their character became.

When the angels came to Ibrāhīm ﷺ to announce the birth of his son Isḥāq ﷺ, they were on their way to the city where Lūṭ ﷺ lived. They came in the guise of three handsome young lads, and they chanced upon Lūṭ ﷺ while he was at work in his fields. Lūṭ ﷺ asked them, "Where have you come from?" They said, "We have come to be your guests. We have lost our way, and we can see that you are one of the righteous, so we come to you to beg shelter for the night."

Now the Lord had commanded them not to destroy the city, unless they heard Lūṭ ﷺ complain thrice of the evil folk. When Lūṭ ﷺ heard their speech, he despaired and said, "O my guests, how should I put you up, how will I bring you to my house safely? If only I could see a way to protect you." For he knew that he alone was too weak against the townspeople who would seize the youths and drag them off as soon as they caught sight of them. So he waited until nightfall, and in the dark of night he brought them to his house. But even within his own house there was no safety, for the enemy was there, too. Lūṭ's own wife, no sooner had she seen the handsome youths than she went running off into the town and told everyone about them, and she said that they were suitable for entertaining their king. A crowd assembled in front of Lūṭ's house and demanded that he hand over his guests. Lūṭ ﷺ cried, "O, if only I had a strong support that I could lean on," and his heart was heavy and constricted. This was the second time the angels had heard him complain of the evil of these people. In all the long years Lūṭ ﷺ had lived

among the people only a handful of men had turned from their bad ways and accepted his call to Islam, and in his own family there were only his four believing daughters.How could so few defend his guests against the mob of townspeople?

Lūṭ ﷺ went out and spoke to the crowd, "O people, do not embarrass me before my guests whom I have promised to shelter in my house for this night. Do not put me to shame. I have, as you know, four young daughters, and I will give them to you instead, according to the rites of Allah and His prophets in marriage. Take them and repent, and leave my guests inviolate." They laughed at him with scorn, and said, "What have we to do with your daughters? You know quite well what it is we want, hand over to us those youths." Lūṭ ﷺ wrung his hands and cried, "O Lord, what shall I do, how shall I protect them against their depravity?" This was the third time he had spoken out against them and the angels witnessed it.

The men were now beginning to break into the house violently to take the youths by force, and Jibrā'īl ﷺ revealed himself to Lūṭ ﷺ and said, "Be unafraid." As the first intruders broke through the door, 'Azrā'īl ﷺ blew upon them just a little whiff, but it blinded all those who had entered. They were thrown into great confusion and stumbled about, crying, "These are not men, they are sorcerers and magicians see what they have done to us ..." And they went off into the night of blindness.

The angels said to Lūṭ ﷺ, "It is true, we are not men, we are of the angels. The Lord has sent us to bring destruction to this abode of wickedness. Gather about you your family and companions, and whoever believes in you, and make ready to leave this place forthwith, for the morning is near."

As it is written:

"*They said, 'Lūṭ, we are messengers of thy Lord. They shall not reach thee; so set forth, thou with thy family, in a watch of the night, and let not any one of you turn around, excepting thy wife; surely she shall be smitten by that which smites them. Their promised time is the morning; is the morning not nigh?*" [Hūd, 11:81]

So Lūṭ ﷺ and those close to him made ready to go out from that cursed place. Lūṭ's wife went along, but her heart stayed

behind with her people for she was one of them, and their ways were her ways. Lūṭ ﷺ had been ordered to warn his people not to turn back to witness the punishment when it descended, for no one could bear the sight of it and would have to die on the spot.

"And Lūṭ, when he said to his people, 'What, do you commit such indecency as never any being in all the world committed before you? See, you approach men lustfully instead of women; no you are a people that do exceed.'

And the only answer of his people was that they said, 'Expel them from your city; surely they are folk that keep themselves clean!'

So We delivered him and his family, except his wife; she was one of those that tarried. And We rained down upon them a rain; so behold thou, how was the end of the sinners!" [The Battlements, 7:80–84]

"And when Our messengers came to Lūṭ, he was troubled on their account, and distressed for them, and he said, 'This is a fierce day.'

And his people came to him running towards him; and erstwhile they had been doing evil deeds.

He said, 'O my people, these are my daughters, they are cleaner for you. So fear God and do not degrade my guests. What, is there not one man among you of a right mind?'

They said, 'Thou knowest we have no right to Thy daughters, and thou well knowest what we desire.'

He said, 'O would that I had power against you, or might take refuge in a strong pillar!'" [Hūd, 11:77–80]

"So when Our Command came, We turned it uppermost nethermost, and rained on it stones of baked clay, one on another, marked with thy Lord, and never far from the evildoers." [Hūd, 11:82–83]

Lūṭ ﷺ and his family and followers were leaving the city by the mountain road, Lūṭ ﷺ leading the way. The Wrath of Allah began to descend and the air was filled with dense clouds as if with flies, so that no one could see. Then a rain of burning clay hailed down upon the city, and they were live coals straight out of hell. Each one had the name of the person it was destined to kill written upon it. And from the town arose the sound of great terror, as if a great war was being waged; the roar of fire and the clanging of weaponry, cries of people in agony and unutterable

distress — but the clouds were so thick that they obscured the view. The company of Lūṭ ﷺ ran faster to escape these dreadful noises, and plugged their ears so as not to hear. But Lūṭ's wife thought, "All this is nothing but some magic, pretty soon it will all clear up and the sun will shine again, and everything will be as before. I just want to return and be happy among my people ..." Lūṭ ﷺ was at the head of the party and could not stop his wife from turning back to look at what lay behind. Besides her doom was written for her. The burning stone from hell that had her name on it sailed down and landed upon her, and she died and remained at that place. The angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ is said to have raised these three cities up with his wings and to have turned everything within them upside down. From this upheaval was born the Sea of Lūṭ, which is also known as the Dead Sea.

After having escaped from the Divine Wrath, Lūṭ ﷺ and his people came to rest for a while with Ibrāhīm ﷺ in Jerusalem. Lūṭ's daughters were married there to some Muslims and settled down. Lūṭ ﷺ, having completed his mission, went on to Mecca and worshipped the Lord of the Ka'ba until he died. He is buried in an unknown place near the Ka'ba, as are many prophets, who ended their lives there once their work was done. And Allah's peace and blessings be upon all of them, Amīn.

25 — ISMĀ'ĪL عليه السلام

E HAVE ALREADY TOLD the story of Ismā'īl's birth. Before Ibrāhīm عليه السلام died, he came one last time to the Ka'ba to bid farewell to his sons and grandsons, then he went back to his country and died there. He is buried next to his wife Sāra in Khalīl (Hebron) in the Holy Land. Ismā'īl عليه السلام returned to Mecca after burying his father and lived there with his second wife Sayyida. He was a hunter and had twelve sons. He also had one daughter and her name was Bāsima. When his sons had grown, he said to them, "You and your families shall live in these desert regions and become Bedouins." Ismā'īl عليه السلام is the father of the Arabs who roam the deserts, the nomads of Ḥijāz, Najd and Yemen. Two of his sons he kept with him to assist him in the guardianship of the Ka'ba.

One day the Lord sent the angel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام to Ismā'īl عليه السلام to reveal to him his prophethood. Whenever the angel came to a prophet, this man suffered great fear and trepidation, for the presence of the angels is awesome to mankind. When Jibrā'īl عليه السلام came to Ismā'īl عليه السلام he was seized by a trembling and he could not speak, so severely did the presence of the angel affect him. At last he found his tongue and said, "I have received the Command of my Lord, I hear and obey, and I will dedicate my life to serving Him alone and to calling my people to the way of truth. But to which religion shall I call them?" The angel answered. "To the religion of your father Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and to his law."

The first people Ismā'īl عليه السلام was to address were the members of his own family and those who lived close to Mecca and in surrounding regions. They all became followers of this prophet and loved him greatly. He was a prophet for sixty years. Of all the prophets who were ever sent, Ismā'īl's prophethood was the

easiest. He suffered the least opposition to his call. The only place where he encountered difficulty and strife was with the people of Yemen, the descendants of the people of 'Ād who had gone before him. They were still a headstrong folk, and when he went to them, they demanded that he perform miracles and return them to their former state of glory, for they had once had a powerful kingdom. They were greedy and bellicose, and with them Ismā'īl عليه السلام had to struggle hard. He spent altogether fifteen years in the Yemen, and though a lot of people came to Islam, others did not. He died when he was 160 years old and he was buried beside his mother Hājar in Mecca, in the neighbourhood that bears her name.

26 – ISḤĀQ عليه السلام

HEN IBRĀHĪM عليه السلام died, Isḥāq عليه السلام remained in the land of Palestine. He was also a prophet in his land, and he was given a large area to look after, from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and all the way north to the lands of Shām, the land around Damascus. When he had grown up and his mother Sāra was still alive, he wished to get married. As they lived surrounded by hostile people, Ibrāhīm عليه السلام did not at first want to marry him to one of the daughters of those people, for he was afraid that his son would be influenced by the idolaters. But the Divine Command came for Isḥāq عليه السلام to look for a wife from amongst them. So he went out one day until he came to a spring. Isḥāq عليه السلام was very thirsty from travelling, and he received Divine Instruction to ask all the women there to give him water, and whoever would draw water for him to drink, she should be his bride.

Isḥāq عليه السلام asked all the women by the well for a drink of water, but they ignored him and went their way. The very last girl showed him kindness and gave him what he asked. Isḥāq عليه السلام addressed her, and as they talked, he learned that she was the only one among all her people who believed in the Unity of Allah and did not adore the sun, the moon or the stars as the rest of her family. Isḥāq عليه السلام returned and told his father about the encounter at the well. Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and his wife went to ask that family for the hand of their daughter for their son Isḥāq عليه السلام, and they found that they were good people, though they knew nothing of Ibrāhīm's way. Isḥāq عليه السلام was married to the girl and they had children and lived together happily.

Isḥāq عليه السلام and his brother Ismā'īl عليه السلام paid each other regular visits, particularly on the annual occasion of the Ḥajj. The custodianship of the Ka'ba passed into the hands of the sons of Ismā'īl عليه السلام and remained in the family for a long time. One year

when Ismā'īl's daughter Bāsima was about fifteen years old, Isḥāq ﷺ came to Mecca with his son Elyas'a who was about twenty-five. The boy met his uncle, kissed his hands and said, "I am your brother's son." He also met his cousin, Bāsima, and found her to be a model of virtue, well-mannered, and strong in her faith. The day before they were to leave Mecca, he came to his uncle and asked for his daughter in marriage. His uncle said, "Let me think about it for a little while," and went and discussed the matter with his wife Sayyida. She said, "There is no better match for our daughter than your brother's son." The young man did not sleep all night from excitement: would they accept his proposal or not? The next morning, his uncle announced to him their consent, and it was decided to set out all together to celebrate the wedding in Jerusalem. And so it was done.

After the marriage of this son, Isḥāq ﷺ had two more sons, and they were born as twins. When their mother Rifqa (Rebecca) was pregnant with them, she suffered great pains, and when the time of birth approached, she could hear the two infants arguing with each other in her womb. They had a disagreement about which of them should be the first to emerge. One said, "I am going to leave the womb before you," and the other answered, "Allah Almighty created me first; it is only right that I should be the firstborn." Answered the first: "If you do not let me out first, I will cause your death, and the death of our mother as well." "O no," said the other, "you must not do that. If it means so much to you, then you go first ..." All those present could hear the voices of those children arguing in the womb of their mother. The first son was born, and he was large and strong and came out quickly, and they named him 'Āṣ (Esau) because he was disobedient from the outset (from *'āṣī*, meaning disobedient, rebellious). Then the second son was born, and they named him Ya'qūb (Jacob). But his father Isḥāq ﷺ loved his firstborn 'Āṣ more than Ya'qūb, because he grew to be strong and manly, while Ya'qūb remained slight.

Allah gave Isḥāq ﷺ 100 years of prophethood after the death of his brother Ismā'īl ﷺ at Mecca. He called people to the true

faith of his father Ibrāhīm, and he had a great following. He grew to be so successful that the rulers of the land of Shām grew envious and feared he would overpower them. They began to incite their people against Isḥāq ﷺ, and said, "Let him bring proof of his claims, let him produce something we can see and touch," for people are ever inclined to worship things they can see, and find it difficult to believe in the invisible, unseen world. So gradually Isḥāq's following diminished. Most people joined the party of their kings and mighty ones, fearing retribution.

Isḥāq ﷺ continued to live near Shām. Aas the opposition grew and only very few of the faithful surrounding him remained, he did not wish to fight the unbelievers, for fear of being overcome by them and the way of truth being stamped out. He led them in the way of peace and conciliation. Towards the end of his life Isḥāq ﷺ had also grown blind, but he saw with the inner eye of prophecy.

One year the rains failed and drought and famine afflicted the land. His companions said nothing of this to Isḥāq ﷺ, for they believed he would know of it of his own accord, by prophetic vision. But he could see only what Allah showed to him. The second year, still the rains did not come, and people could not plant and their flocks were dying. Isḥāq's son who had married his cousin decided to emigrate from that land. His five-year-old son, Isḥāq's grandchild, came to kiss his grandfather farewell, and when Isḥāq ﷺ touched him, he was surprised to find the child so thin and small that he could not walk but had to be carried. He asked him why he had not grown, and the child told him that they had nothing to eat, for it had not rained as it used to, and for two years now there had been no rain. "We are all going to die of hunger here," said the child, "that is why we are leaving." So Isḥāq ﷺ learned these circumstances from his small grandchild, but in his heart he knew that there was more to it, and he waited until there came to him a revelation through the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ. Throughout the whole night he wept and prayed, and implored the Lord to lead them and to show his people the way out of this misery. Then revelation came to him, and the Lord addressed him. "O My prophet

Isḥāq, in times before, your father was ordered to migrate to the land of Egypt, and your people expect you to go there as well. But I, your Lord, am ordering you now to go to the land of Jarrār."

So Isḥāq, as the leader of his people, sent word to the king of Jarrār, requesting his permission to settle on his territory and to live in their tents. The king invited Isḥāq ﷺ to come and stay in his royal palace, but Isḥāq ﷺ thanked him and said, "My place is with my people; wherever they set up their tents, there I will stay." Isḥāq ordered them to dig the ground and they found water where he had told them to dig the well. Jibrā'īl ﷺ had informed him that wherever he would settle, the land would he blessed. So they tilled the soil and sowed their seed, and no one had ever seen such a crop as they reaped that year. And Allah blessed them and gave them increase, and their life was good. The second year passed, and the third, and the king of that land came to visit Isḥāq ﷺ. But Isḥāq ﷺ had not been sent to that people as a prophet, though they were unbelievers. It was to be a place of refuge from the famine, no more.

Seeing Isḥāq's tribe prospering, the local tribes began to speak up against him, saying, "They do not worship the gods we worship, their flocks are growing fatter than ours, their income is greater — pretty soon they will be powerful enough to displace us. They will dethrone our king and install one of their own number as a ruler, they will lead us off in chains and sell us into slavery." At first their king paid no attention to their words of envy, for he was a good man at heart, and he forbade anyone to do any harm to Isḥāq ﷺ and his people. But in time the evil tongues prevailed and a false rumour was launched, that the drought was over and Isḥāq's home-country no longer suffering from famine, and that they might go back now. Isḥāq ﷺ sent out his own messengers to verify this rumour. The messengers returned and reported that the land was even more wasted than before, all was now dried up and deserted. Isḥāq ﷺ sent word to the king and asked his permission to stay on. After a time, the viziers and the jealous retainers of the king prevailed over him, so that he ordered Isḥāq ﷺ out of his land by the next

morning. They had convinced the king that Isḥāq ﷺ was only disobeying his royal command.

Isḥāq's people were surprised at this treatment, for they had considered themselves as guests of the king, and had done nothing but improve his lands and make them fruitful. They were unwilling to leave everything behind once more, but Isḥāq ﷺ firmly ordered them to make ready, to pull up their tent pegs and leave. Nobody dared dispute his authority for he was their prophet. They marched back through the valley of Jarrār, and Isḥāq ﷺ pointed to a place and ordered them to dig there. They dug and found an old well from the time of the prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ, for all this had once been his land. By Allah's Beneficence, they found water and settled there. News of this reached the people of Jarrār, and again they were jealous, and came after them and said, "This is our well, its water belongs to us." And the well was named the "Well of Dispute". Isḥāq ﷺ ordered his people to pack up and move on. They travelled onwards through the valley, and after a while Isḥāq ordered them to dig again, and they had not yet left the land of Jarrār. They found another well, and its water was even sweeter than the water of the first well. But again the people of Jarrār pursued them with envy, and drove them on saying. "This water is ours." At last they crossed the boundaries and left of the land of Jarrār, and they dug at another spot which Isḥāq ﷺ indicated; there they watered their flocks and sowed their seed and took their rest. Therefore this well was named the "Well of Resting". All these wanderings took up a space of thirty years, and in spite of their hardships, they had made the pilgrimage every year.

27 — ISḤĀQ'S BLESSINGS

HERE CAME A DAY when Isḥāq ﷺ was very old that he was commanded to give his blessing to one of his sons, one the last-born twins. He to whom he gave his blessing would succeed him in the prophethood. Now Isḥāq ﷺ loved his firstborn son ʿĀṣ more than he loved Yaʿqūb, but his mother was fond of Yaʿqūb. ʿĀṣ was a strong man and a hunter. He could catch a gazelle with his bare hands, and he also knew how to catch and bridle a lion and ride him into town. His whole body was thickly covered with hair, as furry as the skin of an animal. By contrast Yaʿqūb, was slight and tender-skinned and he worked as a shephered.

Isḥāq ﷺ sent for his son ʿĀṣ, saying, "I have been commanded to impart my blessing upon one of you, and as you are my firstborn, I wish you to succeed me. But it has occurred to me that there is no meat in the house and I wish to eat some. Go then and hunt for me, and bring me some roasted meat. Then I will eat and bless you." Who should overhear these words but his wife Rifqa? She immediately sent for her second son Yaʿqūb and ordered him to slaughter a sheep and to cover himself with its skin. Then he was to cook its meat and bring it to his father. Yaʿqūb always did what his mother told him to do. Then he went in to his father, pretending to be ʿĀṣ, and he said, "O father, I have done as you wished. Here is the meat. Eat of it, and afterwards give me your blessing."

Isḥāq ﷺ could not tell the difference between the meat of a sheep and the meat of a hunt. But he thought that the voice of ʿĀṣ sounded a lot like the voice of Yaʿqūb, so he said, "Come closer, my son." And he stretched out his hand to touch him, and he felt the sheep's fur, and it felt to him like the hairy skin of ʿĀṣ. Then he ate, and after he had eaten he imparted on Yaʿqūb the blessing he had intended for ʿĀṣ. "O my son," he

said, as he placed his hand upon Ya'qūb's head, and he prayed that he might become the father of prophets. All the following prophets are descended from Ya'qūb ﷺ, except the prophet of the last times Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ. Our Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was to come through the line of Ismā'īl ﷺ, and he is the only prophet to have descended from him, all others were descendants of Isḥāq ﷺ. Isḥāq ﷺ gave Ya'qūb ﷺ his blessing. Then Ya'qūb looked at his mother who said to him, "Go now, run away and hide yourself, for when your brother comes home he will want to kill you." She knew that 'Āṣ was a rough fellow and that he had little kindness or mercy.

So Ya'qūb ﷺ left and took nothing with him but a little food, and he hid himself in a cave. 'Āṣ returned only after nightfall for the Lord Almighty delayed him that long. Then he went and roasted the meat he had brought from the hunt and took it to his father. He said, "O my father, forgive me that I am late, do not be angry with me." "Was it not you, then, who brought me the roasted meat during the day, was it not you whom I blessed after I ate?" "No, by Allah, it was my brother who has betrayed me; I will go and kill him, I will seek out his hiding place and tear him limb from limb ..." "Wait, O 'Āṣ, my son: I have yet another blessing to give," said Isḥāq ﷺ, "I will pray for you to become the father of all the rich men in the world." But 'Āṣ was enraged and would not hear of it. "If I want any blessing it is to be the father of all the prophets who are to come ..."

He stormed from the house to look for his brother, to do him to death. Now 'Āṣ was a prodigious hunter and possessed great physical prowess, and Ya'qūb ﷺ was in great danger of being found. He searched for Ya'qūb ﷺ amidst the rocks and caves, shouting and cursing all the while. Hiding in his cave, Ya'qūb ﷺ heard him, and the Lord protected him so that he could not find him. Ya'qūb ﷺ waited until he could be sure that his brother had gone, then, still in the night, he took up his path and went where his mother had directed him to go, to the land of Madyan. There lived his uncles, his mother's brothers, and he was to stay with them for a while, for his brother would not

easily forget his grievance. Every night he marched and in the daytime he found crags and caves to hide himself in. In Arabic this journeying by night is called *isrā'*, and for this reason Ya'qūb's descendants are named the Children of Isrā'īl.

Ya'qūb ﷺ marched on like this for eleven or twelve nights until he reached the safety of his uncle's dwelling. He told his uncle what had happened and his uncle assured him that he was safe with him, for he had crossed the border between two countries, and his brother had no right to persecute him there. His uncle was also the chieftain of his tribe in Madyan.

The very first person Ya'qūb ﷺ was to see when he entered his uncle's household was an extremely beautiful young girl, his uncle's daughter. He saw her only once but he could not forget her. He asked his uncle for his daughter's hand in marriage, and his uncle was agreeable to the proposal, but consented only under the condition that Ya'qūb ﷺ should work for him, herding his sheep, for seven years. When the seven years were over, they prepared the wedding, and the couple was married. Now the uncle had two daughters, and it was the custom to marry off the elder daughter before the younger one. So naturally, his uncle gave him the elder daughter, Leah. Ya'qūb had not seen his bride again before the contract was written, and when he went in to his bride and unveiled her, he found her not to be the girl he had longed for, but rather her sister.

The next day he went to his uncle and said, "Uncle, the bride is not the one I had bargained for with you." "No matter," said his uncle, "if you work for me for another seven years, I will give you the younger one, too." At that time it was not forbidden to marry two sisters at once. So Ya'qūb ﷺ herded his uncle's sheep for another seven years, then he married Rāḥīl, the younger sister. By now he had two sons from his first wife, and Rāḥīl also bore him a son, Yūsuf. His first wife had a slave-girl whom she gave to Ya'qūb ﷺ to be his wife, and she bore him four more sons. The mother of Yūsuf also gave him her slave-girl, and this one bore another four sons. Altogether Ya'qūb now had eleven sons, and no one counted the daughters in those days.

In the meantime, his father Isḥāq ﷺ had passed away, as well as his mother Rifqa, and they were buried together at Khalīl. When Ya'qūb received the news of his parents' passing, he conceived a desire to return to the land he had fled from, even though he knew his brother 'Āṣ was still living there. He set out with all his household, all his sons and their wives went with him and it was a long caravan. Ya'qūb's younger wife Rāḥīl was pregnant again. Her family were idol-worshippers and being the chiefs of that tribe, the idols they kept in their house were made of very precious materials. They were of gold, embellished with valuable gems. When they left their house and home, Rāḥīl had hidden one of the house-gods under the saddle on which she rode, and she was now nine months pregnant. When they were out on the road, a messenger from Ya'qūb's uncle caught up with them and said, "One of our precious figures is missing; whoever has taken it had better return it." Ya'qūb ﷺ answered, "None of our company has anything to do with these things, who should have stolen your idol?" The messenger said, "We will search your bags, and the owner of those bags where it is found shall be the slave of my master for the rest of his life," for that was their custom. They began to search for the idol, but they did not find it. Rāḥīl was seated upon her camel with the idol hidden beneath her, but she made no sign. When they failed to find it, her father uttered an oath. He said "May he who has stolen the idol not reach his destination alive."

The Lord accepted his prayer. When they had proceeded a bit further along their way, Rāḥīl told her husband Ya'qūb ﷺ that it was she who had taken the idol, and she did not know what to do. How could she confess in front of all those people, and how should she, the daughter of the chieftain, become the servant and slave of her own father? Ya'qūb ﷺ also did not know what to do, and before long his uncle's prayer was answered. Rāḥīl felt the pangs of labour and she gave birth to a son. In the course of giving birth, she also gave her own life, and she died. Ya'qūb ﷺ named the boy Binyamīn, which means in Syriac 'that which burns inwardly', or 'son of my sorrow', as

the hot sands by the roadside burn in the heat of the sun where Rāḥīl lies buried, or the heart of Ya'qūb ﷺ burns with the loss of his beloved wife.

Now they travelled on until they had reached his old home, and Ya'qūb ﷺ sent out his sons and their families ahead of him, himself coming last of all. He told all his sons to expect to see his brother, their uncle, and he described to them what he would look like. He told them what to answer if that man appeared and asked them who they were and to whom the caravan belonged and where it was headed for. They should answer that it belonged to a certain servant of the Lord who had run from his master and who had come back with the intention of making peace. Before long they met 'Āṣ and they knew right away who he was, and everything happened, as Ya'qūb ﷺ had foretold. When they told him Ya'qūb's words, 'Āṣ realized that it was his brother who had returned to his native land.

After all these many years he had not yet forgotten his hatred and his anger at having been cheated out of his birthright, and he said at first, "Ha, now I am going to have my chance for revenge, and I will take back from him my right." One after the other he asked the arrivals the same question, and they all gave him the same answer. When he had heard these words over and over again, something changed in his heart, mercy and forgiveness entered it and he let go of the anger that he had harboured for so many years. He began to weep and he said, "O Lord, for all these years I have done my brother wrong. Now he comes before me in all humility, saying he is my slave who has come to make peace with his master from whom he has fled. No, I am his servant and slave, since I have pursued him so that he had to flee the country and live far from his home for many long years. Since You have written the prophethood and the fathering of prophets upon his tablet, who am I to object? So let it be, I am contented." By the time Ya'qūb arrived, last of all, 'Āṣ's heart had melted, and the two brothers met and embraced and there was peace between them. 'Āṣ shared with him the land he had inherited from his father and they lived together from then on.

In this way Ya'qūb found a brother and lost a wife. He said, "May Allah give me patience." Each time he looked into Yūsuf's face, he saw there amplified a hundred times the beauty of Rāḥīl, the wife he had lost. Allah Almighty has given ten parts of beauty to the world. Nine parts he gave to Yūsuf ﷺ and his mother, and one part to the rest of the world. But the beauty of our Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is of a different order, it is not counted among worldly beauties.

28 – YA'QŪB AND YŪSUF ﷺ

A'QŪB ﷺ now lived with his family in the land of Canaan, and he called people to Islam. Some heeded his call, some did not and as all other prophets, he suffered people's iniquities. Ten of his sons became shepherds, and they looked after his flocks. They prospered and grew rich, built themselves good houses, and began to trade in goods and merchandise. Yūsuf was raised by his aunt Leah who was also his father's wife, and she looked after him well and did not treat him as a step-son. Ya'qūb ﷺ did not send Yūsuf out to herd sheep with his brothers, he sat gazing all day at Yūsuf's beauty. He spent so much time with him that his brothers grew jealous of him, for he completely absorbed their father's attention. One day when Yūsuf was twelve years old, he said to his father:

"*'Father, I saw eleven stars, and the sun and the moon. I saw them bowing down before me.'*

He said, 'O my son, relate not thy vision to thy brothers, lest they devise against thee some guile. Surely Shayṭān is to man a manifest enemy. So will thy Lord choose thee, and teach thee the interpretation of tales, and perfect His blessing upon thee and upon the House of Ya'qūb, as He perfected it formerly on thy fathers Abraham and Isḥāq; surely thy Lord is All-knowing, All-wise.'

In Yūsuf and his brethren were signs for those who ask questions. When they said, 'Surely Yūsuf and his brother are dearer to our father than we, though we are a band. Surely our father is in manifest error. Kill you Yūsuf, or cast him forth into some land, that your father's face may be free for you, and thereafter you may be a righteous people.'" [Yūsuf, 12:4–9]

One of their sisters had overheard Ya'qūb's words Yūsuf to and reported them to the brothers, and their jealousy grew beyond bounds. When the seed of enmity is sown between people,

Shayṭān comes to augment it and to bring to fruition an evil deed. He inspired Yūsuf's brothers to kill him in order to regain their place in their father's affection. He advised them, "Kill him, then you can repent and return unto Allah, He will forgive you." But they were still a little hesitant to go to that extreme.

One of them went to their father and said to him, "O father, you are always keeping Yūsuf indoors with you, he never gets out into the fresh air to play and enjoy himself as boys should. Send him out with us one day, it will be good for his health and it will make him happy."

As it is told in the Holy Qur'ān:

"They said, 'Father, what ails thee, that thou trustest us not with Yūsuf? Surely we are his sincere well-wishers. Send him forth with us tomorrow, to frolic and play; surely we shall be watching over him.'

He said, 'It grieves me that you should go with him, and I fear the wolf may eat him, while you are heedless of him.'

They said, 'If the wolf eats him, and we are a band, then we are losers!'" [Yūsuf, 12:11–14]

Ya'qūb ﷺ did not wish to send his favourite Yūsuf out with his brothers, but at long last they talked him into it. Yūsuf himself also pleaded, "O father, let me go with my brothers, and see what it is like to be with them. They say to me, 'What kind of a boy are you that you never leave the house, like a girl.' Let me go out just once to play and run about with them." Ya'qūb's heart was burning when he dressed Yūsuf in his best clothes to send him out with his brothers, but he knew deep down that it was the Divine Plan being enacted, and that it had to be so. He reminded his sons to take good care of Yūsuf and not to bring grief on him, and also not to let him tire himself out too much, for he was not used to the outdoor life. They promised to look after him well and took off.

They carried Yūsuf on their shoulders until they were out of sight from where Ya'qūb ﷺ stood watching them. When they had gone far enough to be out of earshot they flung him down and began to push him around and rough him up. They pulled his hair and played rough games with him, until he cried and demanded to know why they were treating him so unkindly.

They did this from their excessive jealousy, and he was still only a very young boy. Finally they came to a well. There they wanted to kill him, but the eldest among them, Yehūda, stopped them and suggested that they just throw him into the well and leave him there, perhaps a caravan might pass by and pick him up. The brothers all agreed that this was a better plan than to commit outright murder, and they pushed him down into the deep well. As he fell, the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ rushed up to catch him before he fell and hurt himself. Once before Jibrā'īl ﷺ had rushed to save a prophet who was being hurled to his death: when Nimrūd had flung Ibrāhīm ﷺ into the fire, Jibrā'īl ﷺ had picked him up in mid-flight. So he set Yūsuf gently on a big rock which was in the well. On it sat a big snake, and it wanted to speak up against Yūsuf ﷺ, but the angel told it to be quiet; the snake, however, was deaf.

Yūsuf's brothers meanwhile had taken his shirt and soaked it with the blood of a crow that they had killed. In the evening they went home to their father, showed him Yūsuf's shirt and told him a false, lying story.

"'*Father, we went running races, and left Yūsuf behind with our things; so the wolf ate him. But thou wouldst never believe us, though we spoke truly.' And then brought his shirt with false blood on it ...*" [Yūsuf, 12:17–18]

They told him that they had left their brother near their bags to rest while they went off to hunt and play, for he was not accustomed to their ways and tired easily. When they returned after a little while, nothing remained of him but his bloody shirt. But Ya'qūb ﷺ knew they were lying, besides Yūsuf's shirt was not at all torn, it was only coloured with blood. He said, "I know you are lying to me. How could the wolf have eaten him without tearing him up? And had he really eaten Yūsuf, he would be better than you ..." And he wept for Yūsuf.

It is related that for three or for seven days they returned to the well and brought food for Yūsuf. The angels came there, too, and kept him company. Until one day a caravan happened to pass by that well. The brothers were watching from afar; when Yūsuf climbed out of the well, it was as if the sun had

risen over the mountains, all was filled with light. That is how they came to know that Yūsuf had gone from the well.

One day, long before these events, Yūsuf had been regarding himself in a mirror, while combing his hair. He had admired his reflection in childish vanity, and asked of his mirrored image, "I wonder how much they would pay for me, if I was sold into slavery?" He was proud of his beauty, and for that Allah Almighty made his thoughts come true, and he was sold as a slave.

The caravan had come to a halt by the well, wishing to draw water. They let down a bucket on a rope, but instead of water they drew out the boy Yūsuf who had grabbed a hold of the bucket. The camel-men said, "A lucky day for us — instead of water we have drawn up this fine young lad who will fetch a fair price in the market." One of their number had seen a dream 40 years before. He had seen the moon fall from the skies and drop into a well. Then it sprang out of the well, and sat upon his knee. He had gone at the time to all the diviners and dream-interpreters that he knew. They said his dream meant that one day somebody, of mankind or jinn, would come to him out of a well, and that through him he would become richer than the king of Egypt. When they drew up the boy in the bucket he thought this was his dream come true. Yūsuf's brothers had come running when they saw Yūsuf's light emerging from the well, and they asked the man to pay seven dirhams for him, which is a very small sum. They explained that he was their runaway slave and that they had imprisoned him in the well for that reason. The man placed him upon a camel saddle and made a sunshade for him. They also put chains on him so that he would not escape. They set out and Yūsuf said not a word. The other slaves accompanying the caravan quickly grew jealous of Yūsuf and of the special attention he received, and Shayṭān had a hold of their hearts.

When they passed by the spot where Yūsuf's mother is buried, he wanted to dismount from his camel to cry over her grave. "Look mother, what has become of your son," he cried within his heart, "I am an orphan and my own brothers have

sold me into slavery. They have separated me from my father, and now I pass by your grave in bondage ..." And he wept bitterly. The slaves assumed that he was attempting to flee, and they came after him and beat him until his face was puffed up and swollen, and they made him very miserable.

All of a sudden, a cloud appeared out of the blue, directly overhead of the caravan, and a terrible storm arose. There were hailstones so large that they drew blood from whomever they hit. The leader of the caravan was a gifted and far-sighted man. He saw that it was hailing only on his caravan, nowhere else, and he realised that something must be very wrong, for he knew this to be a Divine Punishment falling from the heavens. He stopped the caravan, and it occurred to him to look for the strange boy they had pulled out of the well. He found him beat up and bleeding, wounded and in chains. He asked the other slaves what caused this, and the jealous slaves answered that they had only prevented Yūsuf from running away. The caravan master asked Yūsuf if this was true, and he said, "No, I wished only to visit my mother's grave as we passed by it, and to pray for her, and to weep." The master said, "If you wish, I will have those who mistreated you killed on the spot." "No," said Yūsuf, "I have forgiven them, do forgive them as well."

29 – YŪSUF ﷺ AND ZULAYKHA

THEY CONTINUED on their way to Egypt, His master had taken the chains and shackles off Yūsuf's hands and feet and never let him out of his sight. He rode beside him, ate and slept at his side until they arrived at their destination. There he said to his wife, "See I have brought this boy. Treat him well, for he is the most valuable thing we possess. Wash him, comb him and groom him, dress him in fine clothes, so that he might fetch us a good price." The next day was to be market day.

One of the lords of Egypt had a daughter named Zulaykha and she was the most beautiful woman of her time. She had many, many suitors, but she waited, and none was good enough

for her. One night she had a dream, and she awoke from it in an altered state, as if she had lost her mind. Her family did not know what had befallen her, and they tied her arms and legs and treated her as a madwoman. This state continued for a whole year. Then one night she saw another dream, and she awoke from it and her madness was gone.

Her father then asked her, "O my daughter, for one whole year you have been lost in the night of madness; now of a sudden reason has returned to your mind, will you not explain to us what has been happening with you?" "Father," she said, "last year I beheld in my dream a young man, and the sight of him robbed me of my mind. Now I have seen him again in my dream, and reason has returned to me." "Tell us who he is, where he lives, we will find him for you, we will do anything to make you happy. Should you see him again in any dream or vision, ask him who he is so that we might marry you to him, and we will be happy with you."

In the third year she again saw that youth in her dream and it was Yūsuf. She asked him in her dream, "Who are you? Where is your country?" "I am the King of Egypt," he answered her, then she awoke before she could ask Yūsuf any more questions. She went and told her father what she had seen in her dream. Her father wrote to the king concerning his daughter and offered him her hand in marriage. He wrote that his daughter's beauty was famed throughout the land and that many young men were courting her, but that she would grant favour to none but the king whom she had seen in her dreams. The king of Egypt sent a reply saying, "Whoever is pleased with us, we are pleased with them."

So preparations were begun for a most splendid wedding. Her father loaded her dowry on 500 camels, pearls, gems, silks and brocades, and she was accompanied by 500 slaves and 500 slave girls. They set out in procession to the palace of the king. He, too, set out to meet his bride. Now, she had one trusted servant-friend with her, her confidante. When she beheld the king, she realised with utter dismay that he was not the vision of her dream and she turned to her companion and told her. Her con-

fidante counselled her and said, "You cannot back out of this now; you have given him your word, and it cannot be broken. He is after all the king, just think of what this would mean for your father ... Pray to Allah, and be patient. One day He may give you relief and you may encounter the young man of your dreams." The girl went straight to her quarters in the palace and wept, she would neither show herself nor speak to anyone.

The couple were married, but according to one narration, the king of Egypt was less than a man; according to another Allah sent to him a Jinn at night who assumed Zulaykha's shape, so that she remained a virgin queen.

At the time Yūsuf arrived in Egypt he was 12 or 14 years old. He was washed and dressed and prepared for the slave market by the wife of the man who had purchased him from his brothers. The next day he was led to the market. The king of Egypt himself was out strolling that day, saw the boy, and said to his wife Zulaykha, "Look at that boy, let us buy him, perhaps we can adopt him as our own son," for they had no children of their own. So the king bought Yūsuf for his weight in gold, and silver and gems, and that was a very great price. They emptied the whole treasury onto the scales and yet Yūsuf's weight could not be matched. Finally the seller said, "It is enough, I have accepted your payment," and the king took the boy home with him, and the man's dream was fulfilled.

Zulaykha regarded the boy and nearly fainted, and said to her confidante, "It is he whom I have seen in my dream." "Be patient until Allah shows you a way. After all, Allah did show him to you in your dreams, it must have a meaning, but take care." The king said to his wife, "This boy will be as our son, not as a servant, for we have no children of our own. We shall adopt him." He left Yūsuf in his wife's care and Yūsuf began to grow up.

A year passed, or two, but he never raised his gaze to look at her, nor at any other woman. He was obedient and did as he was told. At last when he had grown to be a young man, Zulaykha could not longer contain herself. "O Yūsuf," she would say, "how lovely are your eyes ..." Yūsuf answered "The first

thing the worms will eat are the eyes ..." She said, "Yūsuf, your fairness has enchanted me!" "He answered, "When we go to the grave, nothing will remain of fairness of skin or countenance, only a hollow-eyed skull ..." She said, "O Yūsuf, how charming is your stature ..." He said, "The earth will take it and the worms will eat it ..." She flattered him in the most tempting way, and he only gave repulsive answers, so that he would not be tempted to yield to her seduction. Finally, she could stand it no longer, her patience had come to an end. She led him into a room one day when the master was away. This room had seven doors and they were made with specially designed locks. Then she took off her clothes and reclined on her couch.

The Holy Qur'ān speaks of this event:

"*Now the woman in whose house he was solicited him, and closed the doors on them. 'Come,' she said, 'take me!' 'Allah be my refuge,' he said, 'Surely my Lord has given me a goodly lodging. Surely the evildoers do not prosper.'*

For she desired him, and he would have taken her, but that he saw the proof of his Lord. So was it, that We might turn away from him evil and abomination; he was one of Our devoted servants." [Yūsuf, 12:23–24]

It is written, "*... but that he saw the proof of his Lord.*" What was that proof? As he looked about the room he saw his grandfather Ibrāhīm ﷺ and his father Ya'qūb ﷺ and he saw the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ. They all appeared to his vision, crying to him, "O son, you are a link in the succession of the prophets, do not yield to this temptation, do not succumb to immorality!" He beheld all these presences and he grew afraid and turned to run and flee from the woman. He ran towards the door that she, had locked with a special key, believing nobody could open it, but the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ unlocked it for Yūsuf. She ran to stop him and caught hold of his shirt from behind, and it tore as he tried to get away from her.

"*They raced to the door; and she tore his shirt from behind.*" [Yūsuf, 12:25]

At that moment her husband returned and was standing behind the door. She tried to shift the blame onto Yūsuf and said, in the words of the Holy Qur'ān:

"'What is the recompense of him who purposes evil against thy folk, but that he should be imprisoned, or a painful chastisement?'

Said he, 'It was she that solicited me.' and a witness of her folk bore witness, 'If his shirt is torn from before then she has spoken truly, and he is one of the liars; but if it be that his shirt has been torn from behind, then she has lied, and he is one of the truthful.'

When he saw his shirt was torn from behind he said, 'This is of your women's guile; surely your guile is great. Yūsuf, turn away from this; and thou, woman, ask forgiveness of thy crime; surely, thou art one of the sinners.'" [Yūsuf, 12:25–29]

He urged her to repent to her Lord and to abandon her wiles. The women from the town came to hear of this incident, and they all blamed her for falling in love with her slave while she was the wife of a powerful king of Egypt. They ridiculed her and mocked her, and thought her low. So she invited a group of the wives of the notables to her house for a meal, and she had made arrangements for Yūsuf to come and show himself after the meal. Yūsuf had taken to covering his face with a veil, so nobody would be upset by his extreme beauty, for it was hard to bear. After the meal, fruit was served, and each of the women was given a knife with which to peel the fruits. As they held their knives, Yūsuf emerged from behind the curtain, and upon a signal from her he unveiled his face.

"And when they saw him, they so admired him that they cut their hands, saying, 'May Allah save us! This is no mortal! He is no other but a noble angel.' 'So now you see,' she said, ,this is he you blamed me for. Yes, I solicited him, but he abstained. Yet if he will not do what I command him, he shall be imprisoned, and be one of the humbled.'

He said, 'My Lord, prison is dearer to me than that they call me to; yet if Thou turnest not me from their guile, then I shall yearn towards them, and so become one of the ignorant.'

So his Lord answered him, and He turned away from him their guile; surely He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.'" [Yūsuf, 12:31–34]

30 — YŪSUF ﷺ IN PRISON

YŪSUF ﷺ preferred to go to prison rather than yield to her desire, and the Lord answered his prayer. They locked him up in prison on account of all the gossip and talk in the town. But even after they had locked him away, Zulaykha had no peace, his face appeared to her everywhere, and she reverted to her erstwhile madness.

As for the inmates of the prison, when Yūsuf ﷺ was thrown in and joined their company, their prison turned into a paradise for them. When their prison terms were done, they did not wish to leave their gaol, and had to be removed from it by force. They were content just to sit and gaze at Yūsuf's beauty of all day long. Yūsuf ﷺ did not speak, he sat quietly in his corner, absorbed in prayer and remembrance of the Lord. Zulaykha roamed about restlessly, until one day she even came to the prison in order to see Yūsuf ﷺ. The gaolers would not let her in for fear of her husband, the king, so she said, "If I cannot see him, at the very least, I would like to hear his voice ..." Since Yūsuf ﷺ would not speak to anybody, she asked them to beat him a bit so that he would cry out and she could hear his voice. But the gaolers loved Yūsuf ﷺ as did everyone who knew him, and they came to Yūsuf ﷺ sadly, and said, "O Yūsuf, your mistress would have us beat you just so that she can hear your voice..." Yūsuf ﷺ said, "Beat upon the pillow with all your force and I will scream for you." The gaolers beat the pillow and Yūsuf ﷺ cried out, "Ah!" The lady at the gate cried, "Enough, enough. I cannot stand him being hurt." She cried many tears and turned away and never came back to the prison after this. But if she met someone who told her that he had seen Yūsuf ﷺ, she would give him a lump of gold for having brought her that news. And if a person told her, "Yūsuf has spoken such-and-such," she would give him even more gold. In this way she distributed everything she owned, and after her husband's death, she gave away all he had left her as well, until she became very poor. And still she

would have given away even more only to hear Yūsuf's name mentioned.

Yūsuf عليه السلام remained in prison for a long time and his story was nearly forgotten. One day two men were brought in who were both accused of poisoning the king's food. One of them had been the royal cup-bearer, the other was a baker. They each saw a dream and they came to Yūsuf عليه السلام, for he was known to possess wisdom, and they told their dreams to him.

"And there entered the prison with him two youths. Said one of them, 'I dreamed that I was pressing grapes.'

Said the other, 'I dreamed that I was carrying on my head bread, that birds were eating of. Tell us its interpretation; we see that thou art of the good-doers.'" [Yūsuf 12:36].

But before Yūsuf عليه السلام gave them an interpretation of their dreams, he preached to them and called them to Islam, saying,

"I have forsaken the creed of a people who believe not in Allah and who moreover are unbelievers in the world to come. And I have followed the creed of my fathers, Ibrāhīm, Isḥāq and Ya'qūb. Not ours is it to associate aught with Allah. That is of Allah's bounty to us, and to men; but most men are not thankful. That which you serve, apart from Him is nothing but names, yourselves have named, you and your fathers; Allah has sent down no authority touching them. Judgement belongs only to Allah; He has commanded that you shall not serve any but Him. That is the right religion; but most men know not." [Yūsuf 12:37–40]

They insisted that he tell them the meaning of their dreams, but Yūsuf عليه السلام took his time. He knew also that one of them had not truly seen a dream, but had made it up in order to test him, but he informed them of what was going to befall them, regardless of this. He told one of them, that he would attain honours with his master and pour wine for him as before, while the other would be crucified on the trunk of a date-palm for having mixed poison into the bread.

In fact, there had been a group which opposed the king and was plotting his assassination. These people had approached the cupbearer and the king's own baker and had tried to bribe them into poisoning the wine and the bread. The cupbearer had refused, while the baker had agreed and accepted the

money offered to him. The loyal cupbearer had then gone to the king and warned him of the poisoned bread. The baker, upon questioning, denied his guilt and accused the cupbearer of having poisoned the wine. Thereupon the king ordered the cupbearer to drink of the wine he had supposedly poisoned and he drank it and suffered no harm. The baker was ordered to eat his bread and he refused, so they fed it to the dogs, and they perished. They threw both men in prison until the case had been decided, and in the end the guilt of the baker was established. Yūsuf's interpretation of the dreams proved correct, and as the cupbearer was leaving the prison, Yūsuf ﷺ said to him, "Remember me to your lord, for I am innocent." But the man was so happy at his own release that Shayṭān made him forget the other man's needs. Yūsuf ﷺ remained in prison for ten years, or perhaps it was for seven or eight, or eleven years — and Allah knows best.

One day the Lord sent Jibrā'īl ﷺ to Yūsuf ﷺ who revealed to him, "You have sinned against the Lord." "What is my sin, O Jibrā'īl?" The angel said, "Who was it who created you to be of such enchanting beauty?" "Allah Almighty, my Lord" said Yūsuf. "And who made you more beloved to your father Ya'qūb than all your brethren," asked the angel. "Allah Almighty," answered Yūsuf again. "Who has provided for you? And who arranged for your sale into slavery? Who saw to it that you were thrown into this prison?" the angel continued his questioning. "All this was done by Allah, the Almighty Lord of the Universe," replied Yūsuf ﷺ. "Since you know this to be so, it is a sin and an error that you asked and expected help and intercession from any other than Him. You appealed to an unbeliever for help, you asked one to work for your release who does not believe in the Lord of all created beings, and for that reason the Lord has left you in prison all this time."

Yūsuf ﷺ wept upon hearing these words, he wept a great deal and repented of his error and prayed to the Lord for forgiveness. "O Lord, for the sake of all my righteous forebears who were Your chosen prophets, forgive me; forgive me for the sake of my grandfather Ibrāhīm ﷺ, my great-uncle Ismā'īl

ﷺ and my grandfather Isḥāq ﷺ, forgive me for the sake of my father Ya'qūb ﷺ, and accept my repentance ..." He wept and cried from the bottom of his heart until the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ was sent to him again and comforted him with the message, "Your Lord has forgiven you, O Yūsuf."

31 – YA'QŪB'S ﷺ GRIEF

LET US RETURN to Ya'qūb ﷺ. Yūsuf's brothers had stripped him of his shirt in order to soak it in blood to corroborate their lie. And Yūsuf ﷺ was left naked, with nothing to cover himself, and he cried from shame and confusion, for he had never expected his brothers to treat him so badly. At that time the angel brought him a shirt from paradise, and it was the same shirt he had brought for the prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ, when Nimrūd had thrown him into the fire and taken away all his clothing in front of the assembled crowd. This same shirt was now given to Yūsuf ﷺ in his distress.

Yūsuf's own shirt they soaked in blood and brought it home to their father Ya'qūb ﷺ. Ya'qūb ﷺ examined the shirt and he saw that it was not torn, only blood-stained, and he said, "The wolf who you claim ate him must have been very mild and merciful, since he did not even tear Yūsuf's shirt, go and fetch him, so that I might talk to him." They went out and caught the first wolf they could find and brought him before Ya'qūb ﷺ. They said, "This must be the wolf who has eaten him, for we found him close by."

Ya'qūb ﷺ addressed the wolf, saying, "O wolf, are you not ashamed to have eaten one whose name is inscribed on the tablet of the prophets? You must have known this; how could you have done this deed anyway?" The wolf began to weep and he humbled himself, rubbing his snout against Ya'qūb's feet. Allah gave him speech and he said, "O Prophet of Allah, in truth it is now three days that I have gone hungry, not a morsel of food has entered my stomach, let alone your beloved son Yūsuf ﷺ. Not only have I not eaten him, but I have eaten nothing at

all. Have mercy on me and know that I have been roaming the plains in search of my milk-brother who has been lost. I have had no mind for food or hunting for fear that something may have befallen him whom I dearly love ..." Ya'qūb ﷺ then turned to his sons and said to them, "You see, this animal has a heart more merciful than yours. He fasts for three days from worry about is milk-brother, while you have done harm to your very own brother, my beloved son ..."

Now Ya'qūb ﷺ was a prophet, and his dreams had shown him aforetime how Yūsuf ﷺ, seated on a hilltop, was surrounded by eleven wolves. Ten of the wolves had attacked him, while one of them tried to free him from their hands. Then the earth had opened up and swallowed Yūsuf ﷺ, and he was gone from Ya'qūb's vision. This was the reason for Ya'qub's saying.

"*I fear the wolf may eat him ...*" [Yūsuf, 12:14]

Ya'qub ﷺ wept for many days and nights for his beloved son Yūsuf ﷺ until his eyes went white and he became blind. Once the angel 'Azrā'īl ﷺ came to see him, and Ya'qūb ﷺ said to him, "O 'Azrā'īl ﷺ, swear to me by the Holy Names, have you taken the soul of Yūsuf?" "No," said 'Azrā'īl ﷺ, "I have not taken it." "Where then do you see him?" Ya'qūb asked hopefully. "He is hidden and I have no permission to inform you of his whereabouts."

On another day the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to him and said, "O Ya'qūb, your Lord sends to you greetings of peace and says: All your crying for Yūsuf will do no good, and it will not lighten the burden of your sorrow. Better than crying Yūsuf's name 300 times would be for you to call only once on your Lord, Allah. Had you turned to Him and prayed, 'O Lord, reunite me with my son, or give me patience,' He would have brought Yūsuf back to you, even from the dead." Ya'qūb ﷺ understood and said, "O Lord, I repent and seek Your forgiveness; yet it was You Yourself who gave me this excessive love for Yūsuf. I shall try not to call out his name again ..."

One night Ya'qūb ﷺ saw Yūsuf ﷺ in a dream and he awoke from it crying aloud, "O Yūsuf, my son, where are you?" Then Jibrā'īl ﷺ appeared to him and said, "Ya'qūb, you are falling

back on your promise not to cry for Yūsuf any more. Your Lord sends you *salām* and would have me tell you, that if you do not practise patience, and content yourself not with the trial He has sent upon you, your name will be erased from the tablet of the prophets. Be patient then, and wait for the time to come!" Ya'qūb ﷺ said, "O Jibrā'īl, mighty angel, do you know where Yūsuf is?" "Yes, I do know, but I am not permitted to tell you. You will know when the time has come." After this Ya'qūb ﷺ was silent and excercised restraint and patience.

And it is said that if the verse:

"Verily to Allah we belong and verily, to Him is our return" [The Cow, 2:156]

Had been revealed to Ya'qūb ﷺ, he would not have wept so much for Yūsuf ﷺ. But this verse from the Holy Qur'ān was reserved for the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ, and it was withheld in the time of Ya'qūb ﷺ.

32 — YŪSUF ﷺ BECOMES KING

YŪSUF ﷺ remained in gaol for a long time. Meanwhile Zulaykha's husband had died, and she gave away all her possessions to whomever would bring her news of Yūsuf ﷺ. In this way she gave away all she had and lived alone out in the wilderness. After a long time — some say seven, others say seventeen years — Yūsuf ﷺ was forgotten and a new king ruled over Egypt. One night this king saw a dream, and this is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān in these verses:

"And the king said, 'I saw in a dream seven fat cows, and seven lean ones devouring them; likewise seven green ears of corn, and seven withered. My counsellors, pronounce to me upon my dream, if you are expounders of dreams.'

'A hotchpotch of nightmares!' they said. 'We know of nothing of the interpretation of nightmares.'

Then said the one who had been delivered, remembering after a time, 'I will myself tell you its interpretation; so send me forth.'" [Yūsuf, 12:43–45]

The king's cupbearer who had been imprisoned together with Yūsuf ﷺ remembered that he had met a man long ago in prison who knew about dreams. He went to Yūsuf ﷺ and told him of the king's dream:

"*'Yūsuf, thou true man, pronounce to us regarding seven fat cows, that seven lean ones were devouring, seven green ears of corn, and seven withered; haply I shall return to the men, haply they will know.'*

He said, 'You shall sow seven years after your wont; what you have harvested leave in the ear, excepting a little whereof you eat. Then there after there shall come upon you seven hard years, that shall devour what you have laid up for them, all but a little you keep in store. Then there after there shall come a year wherein the people will be succoured and press in season.'" [Yūsuf, 12:46–49]

The king ordered, "Bring him before me!" when he heard this interpretation. And he was told the story of Yūsuf ﷺ and the women who cut their hands, and he called for an investigation into the affair. The townswomen came and testified that they had never seen any evil from Yūsuf ﷺ. Zulaykha also came and admitted that it was she who had falsely accused him and that he was blameless. The king had Yūsuf ﷺ released from prison, saying,

"*'Bring him to me! I would attach him to my person.' Then, when he had spoken with him, he said, 'Today thou art established firmly in our favour and in our trust.'*" [Yūsuf, 12:54]

Yūsuf ﷺ became the king's trusted advisor. But the prisoners whom he left behind all wept when he left them, for prison had been a paradise to them while he was among them. Many had heeded his call to Islam, and they were his first followers.

Yūsuf ﷺ advised the king to store away most of what they reaped during the seven fat years, and to eat only a little of it. The king appointed Yūsuf ﷺ as the guardian over the land's storehouses, as he had no servant more loyal than him. All the people came before him and he divided their crops into two parts: a part they should eat of and another part that would be stored away for the time of need.

33 — YŪSUF ﷺ AND HIS BROTHERS

WHEN SEVEN YEARS had passed, the rains failed and the Nile did not overflow, as Yūsuf ﷺ had foretold, and there was a shortage of crops, just as before there had been an abundance. In the first year, grain was distributed to the people, as it had been bought from them during the years of plenty. In the second year, people came to buy food with their goods and money. In the third year people bought grain with artifacts of their making; in the fourth year they sold their lands in exchange for food. In the fifth year they had to sell their houses, and in the sixth year they sold their children into servitude in order to obtain food, and in the seventh year of the famine they sold themselves into slavery, for they had nothing left to give in exchange for food.

The famine of those years also extended to the land of Canaan. Yūsuf's brothers and their families had nothing left to eat, but they had heard that there was grain for sale in Egypt and that the governor of Egypt was very generous and open-handed and took pity on the starving folk. So the ten brothers set out for Egypt. Ya'qūb ﷺ did not send his youngest son, Binyamīn, with them, for he had taken Yūsuf's place in his father's heart, and he would not suffer him to leave his side for one moment.

The ten brothers came before Yūsuf ﷺ, and he recognized them, but he did not reveal himself to them. He asked them where they were from and how many brothers they were. They said, "We are eleven brothers now; once we were twelve, but the wolf took one of us, a long time ago." Yūsuf ﷺ heard that they were lying still, and he gave them the grain they had come for and said to them, "You say you are eleven brothers, yet I count only ten of you, whom have you left at home?" They answered, "Since the time our brother was lost to the wolf, our aged father has taken our youngest brother to be his consolation, and he does not part from him even a moment." Yūsuf ﷺ asked, "What happened to your father when his son was lost?" "Our father wept so long over his loss that his eyes turned white

and he cannot see." Yūsuf said, "I give you this grain only on condition that you bring to me your youngest brother that I may see him, otherwise you shall have no more grain and shall not approach me again." "Our father will certainly not let him go with us," they said, "but we will try our best to convince him."

So they returned to Yaqub ﷺ, and when they unpacked their saddlebags, they found that their merchandise had been returned to them. They praised the generosity of the king of Egypt and told their father Yaqub ﷺ what the king had said to them. Yaqub ﷺ was unwilling to send Binyamīn with them, and he made them swear a solemn oath to bring him back unharmed if he let him go. When they had given their pledge, he said:

"*'O my sons, enter not by one door; enter by separate doors. Yet I cannot avail you anything against Allah; judgement belongs not to any but Allah. In him I have put my trust.'*" [Yūsuf, 12:67]

There was hope in Yaqub's ﷺ soul, because he was a prophet and it had been revealed to him by his Lord that they should enter the city by separate gates, always in pairs. Binyamīn had no brother to accompany him, and Yaqub's hope was that he might find his missing brother if he entered singly.

"*And when they entered after the manner their father commanded them, it availed them nothing against Allah; but it was a need in Yaqub's soul that he so satisfied. Verily he was possessed of a knowledge for that We had taught him; but most men know not.*" [Yūsuf, 12:68]

They came again before Yūsuf ﷺ, and still they knew him not. He placed them two to a room, and Binyamīn was left alone, and he was sad and cried, "Oh, if only my brother Yūsuf were with me, then I would not have to be alone." Yūsuf ﷺ said to them, "I will be companion to your brother, so he is not alone." When they were alone, Yūsuf ﷺ asked Binyamīn many questions about his lost brother and his father, and Binyamīn told him that his father was still disconsolate about his loss, that he had never forgotten him, and they, too, had not been allowed to forget. Yūsuf ﷺ then revealed himself to his brother, saying, "I am your brother Yūsuf ﷺ, but as yet you must tell no

one about it, for I have plans, and you must not betray me. In time they will come to know."

The next day he filled up their saddlebags, but into the one belonging to Binyamīn he had his servants secretly place a golden drinking cup. The caravan then set out on its homeward journey. A messenger from the governor caught up with them, called them to halt and accused them of theft. They were amazed and said, "We are honourable people and the descendants of prophets, we are not thieves ..." But the messenger said, "We have orders to search your bags." The soldiers searched all their bags, and last of all they searched the bags of Binyamīn, as they had been ordered. There they found the golden cup, and they arrested him and led him away. His brothers said then,

"*'If he is a thief, a brother of his was a thief before.'*" [Yūsuf, 12:77]

What made them say this? A long time before these events, when Yūsuf ﷺ was still a small child and cherished by his father, Ya'qūb's sister came to visit them, and she said to Ya'qūb ﷺ, "O brother, I have no children of my own. Do give me one of your sons, so that I might raise him and find some consolation in his company." Ya'qūb ﷺ gladly agreed, and said, "Which one of them would you choose?" She looked at Yūsuf ﷺ and said, "Give me this boy." And she took him along to her house, and Ya'qūb ﷺ did not wish to hurt her by refusing her request. But after a little while, Ya'qūb's heart grew sore with longing for Yūsuf ﷺ and he sent word to his sister that he wanted Yūsuf ﷺ to come back. She was very upset and asked, "Why do you not leave me that boy?" "No," said Ya'qūb ﷺ, "it is not that, but I am missing a certain belt of gold and silver that came to me from my grandfather, it is a valuable heirloom and important to me. I cannot think where it has gone, maybe Yūsuf ﷺ has taken it along?" "All right," she said, "you may check every corner in this house, but we have not stolen from you." They searched but found nothing; at last Ya'qūb ﷺ said, "Maybe it is with Yūsuf, perhaps the child liked it and took it with him." "No," said his aunt, "that beautiful well-mannered child, impossible that he should steal anything. But anyway, we will search him, just to set your mind at rest."

They searched and found the belt tied around Yūsuf's waist, as his aunt had dressed him and tied the belt about his undergarment. According to the custom of their time, anyone who stole, became the possession of the owner of the stolen property, so Ya'qūb ﷺ took Yūsuf ﷺ home with him, and for this reason his brothers now said of Binyamīn, "His brother was a thief before him."

So when the governor's men searched and found the golden cup in Binyamīn's pack, they arrested him and said, "Go ye now your way, we have our prisoner. If you wish take his load and goods to his family so that they will not suffer, but you may go now." They said, "O mighty one, this is the worst thing that could have happened. Have mercy upon our aged parent, he is an old man and might not live through another shock of this kind. First, he lost his favourite son Yūsuf ﷺ, and he cried so long that he lost his eyesight. Now he is to lose his next favourite, Binyamīn, and he made us swear solemnly that we would bring him back in safety. We fear now that we might lose him as well. Take one of our number in his stead, we implore you ..." But Yūsuf ﷺ said,

"*'Allah forbid that we should take any other but him in whose possession we found the goods; for if we did so, we would be evildoers.'*" [Yūsuf, 12:79]

They could say no more and left to take counsel among themselves. They said, "Impossible, we cannot leave him behind, our father will not forgive us." So they armed themselves with huge stones which nobody else could have lifted, and all that saw them coming locked their houses against them, for they were a fierce band to behold. They came before Yūsuf ﷺ again and demanded that he release their brother. Now Yūsuf ﷺ could carry as much as two or three of them together, and he challenged them to try and take Binyamīn from him by force. "I have rightfully arrested him; if you think you can take him from me, try."

Now one of the brothers was very hairy, and whenever his temper flared, all his hairs stood up like bristles. They stood out of his clothes and covered him from head to toe like an armour

so that no one could hit him. All his attackers were turned back, and he ran through every battle victorious. Only a member of the House of Ya'qūb was able to restrain him. Yūsuf ﷺ knew about this peculiarity, so he called to him one of his sons whose name was Nūfil, and told him in their language (for Yūsuf ﷺ spoke many languages) to stroke the back of that raging, hairy man whose bristles were standing up out of his cloak like arrows. As soon as the boy touched him, the bristles fell back and all his anger and violence was suddenly calmed. He looked about in surprise, and said, "Who of the People of Ya'qūb ﷺ is present here? All my anger and my power is gone, and only one from the House of Ya'qūb could have taken it from me ..." And he wondered. Yūsuf ﷺ said, "Go now, go to your country and tell your father that his son is a thief."

The eldest brother who had prevented the others from killing Yūsuf ﷺ, now spoke up and said, "When Yūsuf ﷺ was lost, it was I who gave our father the bad news. I will not do this again, "*'Never will I quit this land, until my father gives me leave, or Allah judges in my favour; He is the best of judges.'*" [Yūsuf, 12:80]

The other brothers returned to their father and told him what had happened to them in Egypt. Ya'qūb ﷺ said, "Binyamīn is not a thief, surely there must be some wisdom in this." And he bade them write a letter to the king of Egypt saying: "From Ya'qūb, the son of Isḥāq, the son of Ibrāhīm, the Prophet. The Lord Almighty has given the prophethood to this House and He has honoured us by making us His servants. My son may have committed an error but he did not steal. If you will be merciful with him and send him back to us, the Lord will please you and be pleased with you." Yūsuf ﷺ received the letter and replied: "From the Governor of Egypt to Ya'qūb the Prophet. You have written to us about your great grief and the trials come upon you. Be pleased to have a little more patience, perhaps the Lord will take from you your sadness and reunite you with your loved ones."

Ya'qūb ﷺ received this reply and his heart was glad.

After a while the brothers returned to Egypt in need of more grain, and the Governor asked them, "Do you know Yūsuf?"

"We knew him," they said, but he was taken by a wolf a long time ago," and again they repeated the lie. Yūsuf ﷺ silenced them and showed them a piece of writing, and asked them to look at the signature. The eldest brother, Yehūda, recognized his own signature on the paper, for it was the contract of sale which he had signed when they sold Yūsuf ﷺ to the leader of the caravan.

"*They said, 'Why art thou indeed Yūsuf?'*

'I am Yūsuf,' he said. 'This is my brother. Allah has indeed been gracious unto us.'

'By Allah,' they said, 'Allah has indeed preferred thee above us, and certainly we have been sinful.'

He said, 'No reproach this day shall be on you; Allah will forgive you; He is the most Merciful of the merciful. Go, take this shirt, and do you cast it on my father's face, and he shall recover his sight; then bring me your family all together.'" [Yūsuf, 12:90–93]

Yūsuf ﷺ gave them the shirt which he had worn in the well and which had been the shirt of his grandfather Ibrāhīm ﷺ before him. Now he who had been the first to bring Ya'qūb ﷺ the news of Yūsuf's disappearance was eager to bring his father the glad tidings of Yūsuf's survival and whereabouts. He quickly set out on the way to Canaan. When there was but an eight days journey left, Ya'qūb ﷺ perceived the Yūsuf's scent emanating from the shirt which Yehūda carried, and he mentioned this. His household groaned and said, "There you are again, fallen into your old foolish ways. Yūsuf ﷺ is dead now for many, many years, and yet you are babbling ..." But when the caravan arrived and they laid the shirt upon their father's eyes, the veil was lifted from them and he became seeing once more.

"*He said, 'Did I not tell you I know from Allah that you know not?'*

They said, 'Our father, ask forgiveness of our crimes for us: for certainly we have been sinful.'

He said, 'Assuredly I will ask my Lord to forgive you; He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Compassionate.'" [Yūsuf, 12:96–98]

When his brethren pleaded for forgiveness, Yūsuf ﷺ forgave them readily and without hesitation, while Ya'qūb ﷺ took a bit longer and said, "I will, *inshā'Allāh*, forgive you." For Yūsuf ﷺ

was young, but Ya'qūb ﷺ was an old man, and as age draws on, a man's feelings change less readily.

Then they all set out for Egypt together, and they had become numerous. In all they were 73 persons, children, grandchildren, wives and retainers. As they arrived in Egypt, Yūsuf ﷺ rode out to meet his father, among the ranks of his servants and following. When Ya'qūb ﷺ beheld his son, he fell off his camel, and Yūsuf ﷺ fell off his horse. They were unable to stand from overwhelming emotion, and they embraced on the ground, and sat gazing at each other for a full three hours without speaking a word. And all of Egypt was moved and wept, and the angels of the seven heavens also wept and the Lord addressed them, saying, "O My angels, behold the love between these two mortals, between father and son! Know that I have love for the Nation of Muḥammad 70 times greater than this!"

Yūsuf ﷺ then raised his father up and made him ride ahead of him.

"*And he lifted his father and mother upon the throne: and the others fell down prostrate before him. 'See, father,' he said, 'this is the interpretation of my vision of long ago; my Lord has made it true.'*" [Yūsuf, 12:100]

Then Yūsuf ﷺ addressed the people of Egypt, saying, "O people of Egypt, who are you?" They all were surprised and answered, "We are all your slaves, O mighty one." He said to them, "From this day on you shall be free; all you who have seen my father seated here upon this throne, from this hour on you are free."

The Lord says, "On the Day of Judgment, I shall seat the Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ beneath the Divine Throne, in a place called the *maqāmu l-maḥmūd* which is in Paradise, and I shall say, 'O My servants, for the sake of My Beloved seated upon this Seat of Praise, I forgive all those whom I have caused to wrong the Nation of Muḥammad ﷺ.' This is the likeness of Yūsuf's love and generosity.

Still the the famine in Egypt was not over. There remained very little grain which they had kept in order to plant a new crop when the rains would finally come. People went hungry

for days and were reduced to eating grass and insects, whatever they could find. There would have been great misery in the land but for Yūsuf ﷺ. He would step out onto the balcony of his palace and remain standing there all day long. He lifted the veil from his face, and whoever beheld his radiant countenance forgot his hunger. Finally the rains came, and within a month or two the young wheat sprouted, and people took heart once more and thanked the Lord for saving them from famine and starvation.

34 — THE DEATH OF YA'QŪB ﷺ

IT IS RELATED that Ya'qūb ﷺ remained living with his sons in Egypt for forty years, other sources say it was of twenty-four. His twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. The eldest son was Yehūda, and after him all the Children of Israel are named Yahūd, the Jews. Each tribe kept to itself; each had its separate pastures, dwellings and, watering places, and they did not mix.

After a given time, the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to Ya'qūb ﷺ and said, "The Lord commands you to return to the land of your father and grandfather, to the *Bayt al-Maqdis* which is Jerusalem." Ya'qūb ﷺ said farewell to all his sons and followed his Lord's Command. He came to the place where his grandfather Ibrāhīm Khalīl ﷺ is buried, at Khalīl, or Hebron. There he saw a vision of angels digging a grave in the earth. He also saw a lot of people there with radiant faces, feasting on all sorts of delicacies, and Ya'qūb ﷺ felt a great desire to be among them and to consort with them. However, the angels stopped him and forbade him to converse with those people, "It is not yet possible," they said. "Oh, if only I could be among them," said Ya'qūb ﷺ, "my heart is bursting with longing for their company, at least I wish to give them my *salāms* ..." He was handed a cup, and the angels told him, "Here, drink this draught of eternity, then you will be able to join their blessed company." Ya'qūb ﷺ took the cup and emptied it with great eagerness, and it was the draught

of death. When he had emptied the cup, 'Azrā'īl ﷺ, the Angel of Death, came and took from him his soul. Other angels came and washed and clothed his body in a shroud and placed it in the grave which Ya'qūb ﷺ had seen them digging, right beside the grave of his grandfather Ibrāhīm Khalīl ﷺ. At the time of his death he was 140 or 160 years of age.

Only after Ya'qūb ﷺ was dead and buried did his sons learn of his death. Yūsuf ﷺ cried much and mourned for him, but he comforted himself with the thought that they would meet again on the Day of Gathering. He remembered what his father had told him, when they were reunited in Egypt and Yūsuf ﷺ had asked him why he had wept so much for him, "After all, father," he had said, "I could have been dead, and this life is only a very brief moment in eternity; why then was your grief so excessive?" And Ya'qūb ﷺ had answered him, "O my son, the main reason for my grief was that I knew you to be far away in strange lands and among a disbelieving people and idol-worshippers. I knew not whether you had perhaps forsaken the faith of your fathers and forefathers who have been prophets, and accepted the misguided beliefs of the people you lived among. Had that been the case, I would have had no hope of meeting you again on the Day of Gathering, and this is what caused me the greatest pain."

35 – YŪSUF'S ﷺ MARRIAGE AND DEATH

When Yūsuf ﷺ became king and ruler over Egypt, Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to him and ordered him to give a great feast for all the people of Egypt. "You must invite every single person," he was commanded. So Yūsuf ﷺ invited everyone and prepared a great feast and there was great rejoicing. When it was over, the angel came again to Yūsuf ﷺ and said, "Your feast is not yet complete, not all of your subjects are happy." "How can that be?" asked Yūsuf ﷺ. "You have not paid enough attention to the poor and destitute, the ragged beggars of this kingdom who dared not come to the palace of the king." So Yūsuf ﷺ

again sent out an invitation to celebrate his ascension to the throne, and this time he took special care that the wretched and poor should be treated to the occasion. After this feast was over, again the angel came to him and reprimanded him for not having gladdened the hearts of all of his subjects. "Who else is left?" asked Yūsuf ﷺ in surprise. "There is yet one poor old woman, somebody you once knew well; she lives beneath such-and-such a tree and she has not partaken of your feast."

Yūsuf ﷺ sent out his servants to invite the woman to the general feasting, but she refused, saying, "No, there will be no feast for me until the lord of the feast himself comes to me." The servants did not know how to relay this message to their master, the king, but the woman would not change her mind. Yūsuf ﷺ had already been reprimanded twice by the angel on account of that old woman, so he went to her. He found her seated beneath a gnarled old olive-tree on a bit of straw matting and she was weak and old and very frail. He addressed her, "Here I am, old crone, you have called for me?" She answered with indignation, "What? Is that a way to address your mistress! Are you not ashamed of yourself, you were my slave and I was your mistress? Now you address me so ..." Yūsuf ﷺ stared at her in wonder and said, "Oh, then you must be Zulaykha, forgive me. I did not know you ..." "Yes," she replied, "I am Zulaykha. Hand me the riding whip which you hold and I will show you something." He gave it to her and she blew upon it with a strong puff of her breath. Then she handed it back to him, and as he touched it, he burned his hand and quickly withdrew it, for it was as if he had touched living embers. "Ah, Yūsuf," said Zulaykha, "these are the burning coals I carry inside me for many, many years, the fire of my ardent love for you, and I am but a weak woman. How is it you cannot bear that heat even for a single second?" "Come," said Yūsuf ﷺ, "come to our feast which we have prepared, forgive and forget, life is short enough." "No," she said, "I will not join in the feasting until you have prayed for me to your Lord, for your prayers are acceptable in the Divine Presence. My three prayers are these: firstly, that I may be returned to my former state of health and beauty,

as I was when I first met you. Secondly, I ask of the Lord of the Worlds that it may be written for us to be married. My third prayer is to bear you children who will become prophets after you." Yūsuf ﷺ smiled and answered, "One wish I can grant you, I can marry you, even in your present condition, it doesn't matter, but your other two prayers are in the Hands of the Lord Almighty." And Yūsuf ﷺ prayed for her.

Thereupon the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came and stroked over Zulaykha's face and body with his hand, and instantly she became as she had been before, a queen of youth, beauty and loveliness. Then he said to them, "Come now, both of you, this feast which you have prepared will be your wedding feast."

So they were married at last, for it was the Divine Plan that they were to beget children who were to be prophets.

Zulaykha then believed and accepted Islam at the hand of Yūsuf ﷺ. The moment true faith entered her heart, all the love she had had for Yūsuf ﷺ changed into love of Allah; all the extremes of love that had tormented her for so many years, all the hopelessness of her longing and unrequited love, all was transmuted into love of a higher order, into a burning love of Allah. She began on her wedding night to pray, and she prayed so long and so intensely that half the night had passed already, and still she would not come to bed. "Come," called Yūsuf ﷺ to his bride, but she had forgotten about him and would not join him. At last he reached out and pulled her by the train of her bridal gown, and he tugged at it so hard that it tore. Yūsuf ﷺ then remembered something, and he grew ashamed. "What have I done," he cried. Zulaykha answered, "O Yūsuf ﷺ I tore your robe when it was forbidden, now you have torn mine when it is permitted. But you must know that Allah Almighty has permitted no one to approach me yet, I am still a virgin. The Lord has kept me for you. But, were I not intended by Divine Decree to be the mother of your children, I would not desire this union any longer, it is all the same to me."

Zulaykha bore Yūsuf ﷺ eleven children. All Yūsuf's ﷺ brothers had twelve sons, and twelve were written for Yūsuf ﷺ as well, but he lost one from his loins at the time Zulaykha

had locked the doors upon them both and tried to seduce him, though he remained innocent.

After his father's death, Yūsuf ﷺ lived in Egypt for another twenty-four years. He was greatly loved by the people, for he was a kind, caring king, as well as a prophet, and many accepted Islam at his hand. When he died, they did not want to bury him in the earth, so they made for him a marble coffin and sank it in the midst of the Nile, so that the river would benefit from the blessed presence of Yūsuf ﷺ. By this blessing the river continues to flood the land and gives life to their fields. Yūsuf's coffin remained in the Nile until the time of Mūsā ﷺ, but that story will be told in its proper place, *inshā'Allāh*.

PART II

36 — AYYŪB عليه السلام

YYŪB'S FATHER was Mūs and his mother was Anūs. His father was descended from Isḥāq عليه السلام and the sons of Ya'qūb عليه السلام and the grandsons of Rūm. His mother was a descendant of a daughter of Lūṭ's. Ayyūb عليه السلام was a handsome man, of tall stature and curly haired, and by nature he was upright and generous. His generosity was known and admired by all the people of his age, he showed greater kindness than a man might show to an orphaned child, or to a widow whom he might marry in order to provide for her. The sons of Rūm came to the region around Damascus and settled in a village called Qudsiya which exists by this name to this very day. It is a fruitful and blessed place, situated between two mountain slopes and abounding in sweet running water. There Ayyūb عليه السلام lived and in time he became very rich; he possessed many houses, almost as fine as palaces, and his gardens and orchards bore every sort of fruit. Ayyūb's wife was of the children of Yūsuf عليه السلام, through his son Ephraim. Her name was Raḥma, which means mercy, and she was a very good and loyal wife to him. Together they had fifteen sons and they were all strong and successful. Every day they invited each other to their houses in turn, and they feasted with each other and were glad. They lacked nothing of the enjoyments of life, there were many grandchildren, and life was good for them.

Ayyūb عليه السلام did not forget to thank his Lord for all of these bounties, for he was a pious man and a humble servant to his Lord. He spent his nights in prayer and a part of his days in the little mosque he had built. Then he attended to his work in his fields and gardens, looked after his flocks, his camels and sheep, and he had many obligations. Allah had given to him as much as He had given to any man, and yet Ayyūb عليه السلام grew not proud and heedless of his Creator. In brief, he was a model of a man.

One day the arch-enemy of all mankind, the accursed Shayṭān flew up to the heavens, — for before the time of our noble Prophet ﷺ he was still able to do so, — and he overheard the angels praising Ayyūb ﷺ most enthusiastically, admiring him as a blameless and upright man, second to none. They mentioned how much he did in the way of Allah, how much he gave to the poor in alms, how none of his worldly goods, his children, his family could ever turn him away from the constant remembrance of the Giver of all Bounties, from the Lord Almighty. Hearing the angels sing Ayyūb's praises, Iblīs grew very envious and evil stirred in him. He went to the Lord and said to him, "You have given that servant of Yours, Ayyūb, much wealth and possessions. You have given him health and plenty of children, virtuous wives who love and obey him. No wonder, then, that he loves and praises You so much. He lacks nothing. If only You left matters up to me for a little while, we should soon see what there really is in his heart."

The Lord answered him, "O Iblīs, whatever you do to him, you will not see his heart and mind turn away from Me; nothing will change his devotion." Shayṭān said, "O Lord, give me leave to attack his wealth and possessions, then we will see who is right." The Lord granted him permission to tamper with Ayyūb's worldly goods.

One day when Ayyūb ﷺ was praying in his mosque a great windstorm arose, a hurricane, carrying thunder and hail. It destroyed all the crops on his fields, withered his fruit-gardens, blew away all his flocks, even carried off his camels which were grazing on the mountainside. Everything Ayyūb ﷺ owned was taken away from him. Shayṭān assumed the form of one of the men working for Ayyūb ﷺ and came running to the mosque where Ayyūb ﷺ was praying. He called, "Hey, Ayyūb, you are still in here praying? Have you not heard what has happened?" "So, what happened?" asked Ayyūb ﷺ. "A massive storm arose and has destroyed all your crops; your flocks are drowned, your trees are burnt by lightning, nothing remains of your wealth! It is a disaster, and you just sit here praying, worshipping a god you cannot see." Ayyūb ﷺ answered him,

"Had there been any good in you, you too would have gone down with them."

Ayyūb ﷺ had settled in that village and he was the prophet of Allah in that land. The people had asked him to be their leader, but Ayyūb ﷺ had refused, for he wished not for temporal power. The villagers of that area worshipped idols, and their main idol they called Anūr. Nobody living in the town would accept Ayyūb's call to Islam, but one day three travellers came from a distant land and they converted to the way of Ayyūb ﷺ and became Muslims. Although most of the folk would not listen to his prophetic teaching, yet they all respected him and considered him a good man, for his good intentions towards everyone was well evidenced. Mainly people were superstitiously afraid that if they left off the worship of their idol, this god of their making would become angered against them and cause terrible disaster to befall them. They would warn Ayyūb ﷺ not to go too far, so as not to anger their chief idol and not to solicit his revenge. So when Ayyūb ﷺ answered Iblīs, saying, "Were you one of the good ones, you would have gone down along with them," and then continued his prayer as if nothing had happened, Iblīs almost exploded with anger.

The next day he went back up to the heavens, and what did he see there? All the angels were rejoicing and cheering at Shayṭān's failure. They were singing about how well Ayyūb ﷺ had withstood the temptation of Shayṭān, how nothing had moved him from the love and remembrance of his Lord, how his faith had grown even stronger after the loss of all his belongings. Shayṭān then said to the Lord, "Well, of course, why should he grieve at the loss of property while he has his whole family assembled around him to comfort and console him? You have given him a good many strong and loving children and grandchildren who love and obey him. That is what matters to him, what else? If You would just let me loose upon his family, then we should see what is his true condition." The Almighty gave him permission once more, but He said, "O damned one, even if you carry out all of your plans, you still will not succeed in deflecting his heart from My remembrance for a single instant."

Shayṭān went away, wickedly grinning to himself. On that day, all of Ayyūb's children were assembled in the house of their eldest brother, every one of them present: children, grandchildren, sons-in-law, daughters and wives. Shayṭān called together all the great and small demons and devils, and they shook the house with a mighty earthquake so that it fell down upon their heads and all those within were killed. Then they set a raging fire to flare up that burnt their bodies so that no one could not tell anymore whose they had been.

Again Iblīs went to Ayyūb ﷺ in the guise of one of his servants and said, "Go, Ayyūb, go now and see what has happened, see what a calamity has befallen your house! Still you sit here worshipping that invisible god of yours, while the mighty ones that we worship have brought down the roof upon all of your kin! You have finally succeeded in angering them and unleashing their fury upon us!" He blamed Ayyūb ﷺ for all that had happened. Ayyūb ﷺ turned and glanced briefly at the messenger of evil tidings, and he knew to whom he was speaking when he said, "Were there any good in you, you would have been destroyed along with them ..."

Again some time passed, and Ayyūb's patience grew so great that it surpassed even the patience of the angels. And it pleased Allah to inform the angels that the patience of Ayyūb ﷺ was endless.

One day Ayyūb ﷺ was at prayer in the mosque, and Shayṭān went once more to the Lord and said, "No wonder Ayyūb is not affected by any of this; he still has his health and strength, and with his wives he can have more children and make up his losses. That is why he really does not care. Everything he has lost can be replaced. Nothing is proven unless You let me attack his body and test him by disease and affliction ..." The Lord granted him permission, but He said, "O accursed one, you may visit his whole body with disease, except for his heart, mind, and tongue." Every other part He placed under Shayṭān's control. As Ayyūb ﷺ was performing his prostrations in the mosque, the devil came up to him, and blew into his nostrils a poisonous vapour from Hell. This burnt Ayyūb ﷺ so badly that he rose to

his feet, and no sooner had he risen than his whole body began to swell up. The first day he swelled more and more, the second day he turned all black, the third day he began to drip with yellow pus, the fourth day all his sores burst open and festered, the fifth day and the sixth worms and maggots formed in his wounds, and on the seventh day Shayṭān came round in the form of a man and told people of Ayyūb's ﷺ affliction. "See what has become of him now. He refused for so long to worship the god called Zannūs, and as a result the god has taken horrible revenge on him." This time people began to believe Shayṭān's words, and they all turned against the invalid, disregarding all the good he had done them in the past. His servants stood aside and looked askance, and nobody could bear to be near him because of the stench his wounds exuded.

Even though Ayyūb ﷺ was a prophet of Allah, the Lord Almighty sent such terrible trials upon him, so that he might serve as an example to us all. The Lord teaches us that whenever a man is steadfast in the way of Allah, he will ultimately overcome the wiles of the devil and defeat him in the end.

All the doctors and medicine men had tried their cures and failed, there was nothing they could do for him. Nothing remained to Ayyūb ﷺ, his wealth was gone, his children were gone, and his health had failed him. Shayṭān had got hold of one man named Himar and whispered evil insinuations into his heart. This man had seen nothing but charity and goodness from Ayyūb ﷺ in bygone days, but he was of a mean and low mentality, and the devil's easy prey. This man said, "Ayyūb has been infected with a very dangerous and contagious disease; if you continue to shelter him in this village, he will infect you all, and the same will happen to you as has happened to him." So the people who had for so many years been recipients of Ayyūb's ﷺ generosity and hospitality at one time or another, stood off and cried, "Stay away from us so you do not contaminate us with your loathsome disease!" They drove him out of his own house at last, permitted him not even to stay in that humble corner which had not been wrecked by the earthquake in which he had lost his entire family. They threatened his wife

and said, "If you do not take him away from here, we will set fire to you both."

Two of Ayyūb's wives had already asked him for a divorce and he had granted it to them. According to some accounts he had three wives, and now he spoke to his third remaining wife, Raḥma, "O Raḥma, I will set you free, if you wish it."

Raḥma however was of the descendants of the prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام, and she said, "Whatever happens, I will stay with you and look after you. I would sooner die than leave you." And with that she lifted him upon her back, and since nobody was willing to help them, she dragged him until they came to an old ruin in the corner of a field. But people would not let them stay there either, it was not far away enough, they said. So Raḥma dragged herself on, and they passed through a wooded region, but that, too, was too close. Finally they came to a waste ground, where they found a rough shelter which was no more than a miserable half-collapsed hut. Raḥma bedded her husband on soft earth and placed a stone beneath his head for a pillow. There she tended him lovingly and looked after his needs as best as she could. But how was she going to feed him and herself, since they had nothing left to their name, and nobody would give them anything from charity, for they believed that the curse of the gods was upon them. Raḥma who had been used to all the comforts of life that an elegant lady enjoys, went out and performed menial tasks in the households of whoever would employ her and give her a little food in return for her labour. Shayṭān also did not rest he was busily going about the land, warning people not to give any work to that woman, nor any bread or help in any way, explaining that her husband was a leper, and his illness would pass on to anybody who had dealings with him. So Raḥma had to go further and further afield to find houses where she was not known, and where the story of Ayyūb عليه السلام had not been told.

In this way years went by. Some say three years, others say seven years, yet others speak of sixteen years. Ayyūb عليه السلام suffered his affliction patiently, all parts of him were affected except for his heart, his mind, and his tongue. But by Allah's Mercy, he

did not feel the pain of the worms eating him alive. All the same his suffering was grievous, and the more he suffered, the more patient he grew and the closer his heart drew to his Lord.

The lady Raḥma was a very beautiful woman and her hair was so long that it fell down to below her knees. Whenever Ayyūb ﷺ wished to raise himself up from his sickbed, he held on to her thick plaits and pulled himself up to eat his meals. Shayṭān saw this and said to himself, "Well, we shall see, I will hit him in the heart yet ..." He went around the houses where Raḥma had found work and said to the people, "When that woman comes again, you must take something from her before you give her work and her pay; if you do not, the disease will certainly spread among you. You must take something from her body, for example her hair ..." At that time it was the custom in the land to cut off the hair of women who had committed adultery, and prostitutes were forced to wear their hair cut short.

Now Raḥma used to go every week to one household where she helped to clean and bake the bread. In return she would receive a little bread and food from the people, which she took home to feed herself and her sick husband. One day Raḥma came and she saw that there was a lot of work to be done: the goats had to be milked, the floors washed, food to be cooked and bread to be baked; but the lady of the house said to her, "I cannot give you any work today, nor can I give you anything to eat." "Why is that?" asked Raḥma. "It is because of that sick person you are looking after. We have heard that it is by some sort of evil magic, and we have been warned that the disease will be passed on to us if we have any dealings with you. Only under one condition can I give you anything: if you let me cut off your long hair and give it to me." What could Raḥma do? Her husband was at home and hungry, and no one else would have given her any work or bread, so she had no choice but to let the woman cut off her long, beautiful hair. She got some warm bread in exchange for it and hurried home with the food. Before she could reach the house, however, Shayṭān had come and stood at some distance from Ayyūb's ﷺ hut and called out

to him, "Hey, Ayyūb, I will tell you something that you may not like to believe: that woman of yours whom you love and trust so much, has committed indecency and adultery, and for that they have cut off her hair, as is the custom. If you don't believe me, you will soon see for yourself."

Meanwhile Raḥma was hurrying home, glad because of the fine, fresh bread she had obtained that day, and she came home to find Ayyūb ﷺ sitting disconsolately in his corner. "Look," she said, "today I have brought you good, fresh bread. Eat it while it is still warm." "Yes," he answered sadly, "you have committed indecency, for that they gave you the bread, and they have cut off your hair as well." "Oh no," said Raḥma in dismay, "I have done no such thing; I went to work as usual and the woman gave me this bread in payment." "Well, let your hair down then and let me pull myself up by it", said Ayyūb ﷺ, and then he saw that her hair was indeed cut off. "So it is true what they have told me," he said, "you have fallen into evil ways and your hair has been cut after the fashion of the whores ..." "No," cried Raḥma "for the love of God, it is not so. I am pure and innocent, I have done nothing dishonourable. But the woman I work for acted strangely today, and said she would give me neither work nor bread if I did not let her cut off my hair. I did it only for you, so that you would have something to eat." "If I was sound of body," said Ayyūb ﷺ, "I would give you a hundred stripes," for that is the punishment for those who commit indecency, then as it is now. She said, "If Allah wills you will get well, and I hope to God you will. Then you may deal me one hundred stripes, but still I am innocent, and Allah is my witness." And so their lives and their trials continued, and the time appointed for Ayyūb's illness slowly passed.

The three persons whom Ayyūb ﷺ had aforetime called to Islam happened to come again into that region. They heard and saw what had befallen Ayyūb ﷺ, and though they were sound of heart and inclined to be righteous, they were beset by doubt when they beheld Ayyūb's condition and they began to take counsel among themselves. "Could it be," they mused, "that we were mistaken? We took him to be a prophet and we

believed his teaching to be true; but if this were really the case, how could his Lord have punished him so? If he was really on the path of truth, Allah would never let him sink so low. We must have been deluded in taking him to be an enlightened person." So they went away and turned back to the temples of the idols, and considered building a great new temple to appease the chief idol Zannūs, for they feared they might have incurred his wrath by following his opponent Ayyūb ﷺ.

When Ayyūb ﷺ realised that the firmest and most faithful of his followers were about to give up the beliefs he had worked so hard to implant in their hearts, his heart truly burnt within his breast and he prayed very earnestly to the Lord to rescue them from error. His prayer was then answered, as it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Remember also Our servant Ayyūb; when he called to his Lord, 'Behold, Shayṭān has visited me with weariness and chastisement.'*

'Stamp thy foot! This is a laving-place cool, and a drink.'" [Ṣād, 38:41–42]

His wife Raḥma had gone out to find work, when this revelation came to Ayyūb ﷺ. He was directed to a waterless spot in the desert, and a lot of curious folk went with him, including the three followers who had believed and were now uncertain. At the appointed spot, Ayyūb ﷺ struck the ground with his foot, and all at once water gushed forth and spouted up high towards the sky. Everyone who witnessed this cried out in astonishment, and the three men called, "A miracle, a miracle!" Ayyūb ﷺ then washed in the water, and his whole body was cleansed and restored to its former state of health, or even better than before. No trace of the horrible disease remained, neither within, nor without. He returned to his hut to await his wife and at last he beheld her slowly approaching the hut. She looked for him in the bed of ashes which she had raked together for him to provide some sort of bed, but she found him not there. Instead she saw a strange man whom she shyly asked, "I am looking for a sick person whom I have been nursing, have you perchance seen him?" The man replied, "Whom did he resemble, that invalid you are looking for?" Raḥma raised her gaze to look at

the man, and tears came to her eyes, as she answered, "Had he been strong and healthy, I would have said, he looked a bit like you ..." "Come now, O Raḥma, behold the Mercy the Lord that He has showered upon us! I am Ayyūb and I have been cleansed; you, too, must now bathe in the miraculous water that has restored my health, and you too will become strong and beautiful as you were before these days of affliction." And so it was.

They returned to their village, and people came out to meet them. At the head of the procession came the three men who had first believed, then doubted Ayyūb's ﷺ prophethood. They all begged forgiveness and Ayyūb's ﷺ pardon, and he was quick to forgive them. Allah Almighty gave back to him more than he had possessed aforetime, and all the people became Muslim and Ayyūb ﷺ was their prophet.

"*And We gave to him his family, and the like of them with them, as a mercy from Us, and a reminder unto men possessed of minds.*" [Ṣād, 38:43].

According to one narration, Allah Almighty rained from the skies locusts of silver onto the barley fields of Ayyūb ﷺ, and locusts of gold onto his wheat fields. In this way his fortunes and riches were returned to him and life was better for him than ever before, since people now believed in his mission and Shayṭān was driven away, abased and degraded. One day the rain of golden locusts commenced anew, and Ayyūb ﷺ held open his skirts to catch this Divine Rain of Mercy. The Lord addressed him and spoke, "O Ayyūb, have you not had enough yet?" He answered, "O my Lord, how should I ever have enough of Your Divine Mercies?"

Yet another point is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān. Ayyūb ﷺ had sworn to punish his wife with a hundred stripes for the crime he believed her to have committed when her hair was cut off. When they were re-established in health and happiness, Raḥma reminded him of his oath, so that he might not fall back upon his word, for it was witnessed by Allah. Ayyūb ﷺ was ashamed to do so, and he prayed to the Lord, "O Allah, how shall I do this, how shall I beat this virtuous, innocent woman?"

The angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ then came to him and revealed the following verse:

"*'Take in thy hand a bundle of rushes, and strike therewith, and do not fail in thy oath.' Surely We found him a steadfast man. How excellent a servant he was! He was a penitent.*" [Ṣād, 38:44]

Ayyūb ﷺ lived until he was 290 years old, while others report that his age was 93 when he left this world and was transported to the heavenly mansions.

37 – DHU L-KIFL عليه السلام

THE FOURTEENTH PROPHET was named Bishr which means a messenger carrying joyful news. His epithet was Dhu l-Kifl and there are two stories concerning this designation. According to one, he was called Dhu l-Kifl because he wore his hair parted in the middle. According to the second, he was called this because he could be relied on to carry out his mission with justice and without ever giving vent to his anger. In Syria there is a mountain chain stretching to the Euphrates River, which is called Bishr, most probably in honour of this prophet. Bishr was the son of Ayyūb عليه السلام and his wife Raḥma, who was descended from Yūsuf عليه السلام. Bishr was born after Ayyūb had triumphed over the temptations of Shayṭān and been given back twice as much as he had lost. Ayyūb was 74 years old when his son Bishr was born in the village of Besniye, which lies between Ram and Shām in Syria. He was tall of stature and very handsome. He wore his hair parted in the middle. Ayyūb's eldest son was known as Heymel. On his deathbed Ayyūb called both sons to him and blessed them. He told them that Bishr would succeed him in prophethood, whilst Heymel would govern the land.

Although Ayyūb عليه السلام had been dead for five years, his people had not forgotten him. Their hearts remained steadfast and filled with the love of Allah. They remembered yet the trials of Ayyūb عليه السلام. On the crest of the hill where the idol temple had once stood, a new mosque, was erected and people came from all the surrounding villages to worship there. The prophet Ayyūb عليه السلام had bequeathed all of his newly gained possessions to them and they worked together, sharing their profits in a brotherly fashion, paying their taxes to the Assyrian overlords, experiencing no trouble. Heymel, their chief, was a strong and courageous man, though he was only 25 years old. He looked after

his father's heritage well. His younger brother, Bishr, was five years his junior and though his prophethood had not yet been revealed to him he already preached to the people, exhorting them to remain on the straight path and to commit no crime or injustice. Everyone was hopeful of the day when Bishr's prophethood would be revealed, for he was well loved by all on account of his innate wisdom and pleasant countenance; he spoke kindly to everyone and never showed his anger. People recognized in him the signs of an extraordinary man and set their hopes upon him. When their prophet Ayyūb ﷺ was dying, some people had grown confused and asked, "How is it possible that Ayyūb, who is a prophet, can die and leave us?" It was Bishr, his son, who answered them and allayed their doubts. He reminded them that before Ayyūb ﷺ a great number of prophets had come and gone, and that prophets were but human beings and mortal as they themselves. Bishr was very particular about his personal appearance, washing and dressing himself with care and he wore his hair rather long, parted neatly in the middle. This is how he came to be called Dhu l-Kifl, and in time his first name Bishr was nearly forgotten. People would ask him, "Are you pleased with your father's prayer for you to become a prophet after him, if it be the Lord's Command?" Dhu l-Kifl would answer, "I do not think much about this matter but if the Almighty should arrange the matter thus, He alone knows with how much joy I shall receive His Command, for there is no greater honour for man than to be Allah's messenger. There is also no more exacting task and no burden that weighs heavier upon a man's shoulders than the responsibility of a prophet."

One day his mother Raḥma said to him, "Even though your brother is king in this land, people have given your name to a mountain chain that stretches towards the River Euphrates for the love they have for you and to remember your given name." Bishr answered, "O my mother, I expected no such honour during my lifetime and I shall pray with all my strength that my people might always hold such love in their hearts for the servants of the Lord Almighty and that their hearts might never harden and grow cold. For when the heart of man freezes his

whole life becomes as a sheet of ice upon which he may easily slip, then slide into the ditch of corruption. When he falls, he draws everything down with him." His mother was frightened by these words for she remembered only too well, how evil times had been in the past and she implored him to pray to Allah that Shayṭān might not lead them astray once again and that their beautiful country might not be destroyed by the ruses of the Evil One.

Now there lived a king to the North, who watched the people of Ayyūb ﷺ prosper once more with growing envy. The king's favourite soothsayer and most trusted advisor watched him gradually fall into a state of despondence. He understood well what was bothering him. This man taught one of the slave-girls a certain song which she was to sing to the king and it had the desired effect on him. The king came out of his depressive mood, sprang up and cried, "What are we waiting for, watching them who are our tributaries growing richer and richer? Best we fall upon them while they are yet unawares, before they grow too strong for us to handle! They must have countless treasures hoarded up in those unassuming villages. Was there not a rain of golden locusts in the time of their father Ayyūb? No one knows where they came from or where they have gone. They are not a numerous people. We can easily overpower them and bring their goods into our possession!"

He spoke to his commander-in-chief who was his son-in-law. Being a man of honour, the son-in-law opposed this wicked plan. The king therefore, had him executed and appointed a new man in his place who would do his will. He spoke to this man in private for he wished no-one to betray his plans. However there was a man picking apples from a tree in the palace gardens that day and he overheard all that was spoken. He rushed out through a secret passage and conveyed his message to a trusted friend. This man came to Dhu l-Kifl whilst he was praying in the mosque. He told him all he had heard of the secret plot. At once Dhu l-Kifl rushed out to inform his brother Heymel. He found him working in the fields, for although he was the chief of the village he went to work along with his men, carrying a bag

slung over his shoulder, as is the custom of peasants and shepherds. Dhu l-Kifl informed his brother of the intended attack and of the path the invaders were expected to take, through the valley of Karasakiz and along the bends of the winding River 'Awāj, as it is still called in Syria today. Heymel ordered his men to go out into the mountains as if to cut wood, and they armed themselves under this pretext with axes and hatchets, spears and swords and took to the woods. It so happened that this very same day, the Assyrian tax-collectors were expected in the village to assess their fields and livestock. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ went out to meet them as they approached the outskirts of the village and they asked him, "Where is the headman of the village who is always seen with his donkey bags?" Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ answered and explained to them that today he had come in his brother's stead for they were expecting an enemy attack. "Oh," said the chief officer, "a good opportunity for me to observe a battle for once without being involved in it. But tell me one thing, Dhu l-Kifl, when your men die in battle, it has been observed that they fight bravely until they fall and do not hesitate or swerve for a moment. How do you achieve such steadfastness?" "It is on account of our moral education and religious training," answered Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ. "Indeed," said the soldier, "we have heard about the moral excellence of your people; in your country there is no bloodshed, no theft, no drinking or debauchery. There is no immorality nor any willful injury among you. No man infringes upon his neighbour's rights or honour. Even if a man leaves his door wide open, no one steals from his house. If a person takes even a bunch of grapes from his neighbour, he will either ask his permission or pay him a fair price. No-one speaks badly or slanders his neighbour and each man rejoices in extending hospitality and friendliness to another. Your people are a smiling and happy lot — what is the secret behind all this? I would like to know?"

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ answered the man and said, "I am sure you remember what conditions were like here 25 years ago. You remember what happened to my father Ayyūb ﷺ and you know of the oppression people suffered. They drove my poor father

out, burned and pillaged all he possessed and forced him to live in a dungheap. But when that miracle occurred and the healing water sprang forth from the earth, all things changed for them, and faith entered their hearts anew. They began to observe the Commands of the Almighty and, living in the light of their newly found faith, everything changed for them. Their lives were transformed. Now they love each other like true brothers and sisters. It is as if they are living in paradise already." "Oh, don't keep harping on about that again," said the soldier, "you know we do not believe in your unseen god and all that nonsense." "Ah, but I did not offer to talk about it," said Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, "it was you who asked me about our conditions, so I had to answer you truthfully. For Allah Almighty has obliged us to say what we know; it is He who had created us and given us life, and it is He who recalls us at death. He has sent us here to serve Him. Therefore we should live and deal with each other in a brotherly fashion, worshipping Him alone. This worship is not confined to the mosque. Our worship is life itself, a reflection of the way we treat each other and give mutual support, knowing that in the final end we shall return to Him. Our ultimate destination is the eternal homeland of all souls. It is this knowledge that causes our eyes and hearts to shine with light. How different is the situation of a man who travels to a certain place, knowing that however much he enjoys being there, one day he will have to leave it! His enjoyment is always marred by the knowledge of that final parting ..." And he spoke to him in this vein for a long time.

At last the soldier lost patience and cried, "Be quiet! Now I understand the source of all your knowledge. Your father Ayyūb has taught you his magic, the same as has come to him from his forebears who used to fool simple people from times immemorial!" "It is no magic," replied Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, "it is inspiration from the Almighty Lord. In this point you and all other unbelievers have always been mistaken. Prophets have come to all peoples in all times, again and again they have been decried, condemned and even killed. The names of most have been forgotten, but we remember the stories of a number of

them yet. They are told to us as fairy-tales from one generation to the next." "Enough now of this!" cried the soldier, "I understand from all this only that you are not going to confide in me and tell me either the secret of your magic, or where you have hidden your treasures." At this Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ was saddened and said, "If you could only see inside my breast, you would understand that I am hiding nothing from you and that I am speaking the plain truth. I do not even know what treasures you are speaking of." "I speak of the vast stores of gold and gems that you have hidden away, as everyone knows!" "How very mistaken you are," replied Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, "we have no such treasures — everything we own we use for our simple livelihood. I find it hard to keep from laughing in your face. If you only knew our true condition." "Very well," said the commander, "but soon I will remind you of your words, Dhu l-Kifl!" "You, may remind me of anything I have said to you, I will never feel ashamed of my words, for I have spoken nothing but the truth. I for my part understand now why you have come to us. It is not to survey our lands and to assess our livestock. It is to dig for a treasure which does not exist. Let me tell you once more for the last time: our treasure is found in the hearts of the believers. We have had no time to amass a fortune and to bury it in the earth; we do our work ourselves and employ no slaves and servants; we live a simple life, give to the poor, pay our taxes and expend in the way of goodness. The treasure we carry is within our breasts and within the breasts of all true believers. It is valuable both in this world and in the world to come. If only you knew how valuable a treasure it is, you would cease your quest for mere stones! The name we give to this treasure is *janna*. *Janna* means paradise garden, and it is the reward of all those who truly believe. If only you knew the worth of that great spiritual treasure you would not waste your time on trivial pursuits..."

Meanwhile the army of that other king was stealthily approaching. As the soldiers neared the village, they saw no-one in the fields or on the roads. They mistrusted the silence and feared that they might run into a trap. They kept up their courage however by imagining all the spoils and pleasures they

would gain from this campaign, how the markets of Shām would be filled with goods, the slaves they would carry off and how they would rebuild the great temple of idols on Mount Zeno and a new palace for their king which in its splendour would outshine all the royal palaces of the surrounding kingdoms. There were also women accompanying the army, who incited the soldiery with their songs, provoking them with lewd gestures and promises of the pleasures awaiting their victorious heroes. Heymel and his men watched their approach from their hidden positions on the heights overlooking the narrow gorge through which this army had to pass. His men were all armed but they had strict orders not to shoot. Heymel intended to make a peaceful settlement once the men were trapped in the gorge and realised their position. "I wish no bloodshed," Heymel had told his men "for our Lord has not created us so that we should kill each other. We shall resort to force only if we are attacked."

All proceeded according to plan. When the enemy soldiers grew aware of the trap they had walked into, they were quite ready to give themselves up without a fight. Their commander exhorted them to useless deeds of bravery. His appeal, however, was in vain for the soldiers reasoned, "What is the difference whether we work for you as slaves or for our captors. Death is surely no better than what we already know." So they all ascended the steep slopes and surrendered. Their commander came last of all. They were all bound and led before Heymel who said to them, "We intend you no harm. We know you are forced to act under orders. We will not make you our slaves, for it is not our custom. If there is any man amongst you who will adopt our religion and way of life, we will treat him as our brother and he shall be free. As for the rest, they will be led off to the markets of Shām and sold there in the slave market." Then Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ stepped forth and addressed them. He explained to them about their faith and way of life. None of the soldiers was willing to accept it, however. They all preferred slavery to the service of the unseen God, Allah. Finally Heymel agreed with Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ that it would be better to hand over

the prisoners to the Assyrian tax-collectors than to sell them for dubious profit. This was done, to the delight of the Assyrians.

Now there was one man amongst the prisoners who begged to speak privately with Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ as he had things of great interest to tell him and he hoped to be rewarded for this. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ listened to him. This is what he said, "I have come to know a great many things in my time, as I have travelled widely in the world. For example, I can tell whether an unborn child will be male or female." "That is not true knowledge," interrupted Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, "it is an art used by those who perform abortions." "Maybe," continued the man, "but it is useful all the same. As a young man I was taken captive and came to Egypt where I spent eight years. It was there I learned this skill: one would take a handful of wheat and a handful of barley. The seeds were planted and watered with the urine of a pregnant woman. If the wheat sprouted first, the child was sure to be a boy. If the barley sprouted first, it would be a girl. Later this knowledge earned me a lot of money. After I was free again, I travelled across the great streams into Asia Minor and came to a place called Jannatabād. There I met a tribe that was ruled only by women. These women are in all ways as men. They are taught from earliest childhood how to run and to ride, to carry arms and to fight and they grow up in freedom. As young girls, they cauterize their right breast so that it will not impede their use of weapons. This is a very ancient tradition among them. As for the perpetuation of their tribe, this is how I came to be useful to them. Once a year they have a ceremony and the women are free to roam and consort with men as they wish. If the resulting child is a girl, they let her live, if it is a boy, they either give him to the father or else they kill him. But many of the women cannot bear to be separated from their sons once they are born; they either choose to stay with the father, or else they grieve bitterly over the loss of their children. Their tribe is always threatened with extinction because of this. By being able to tell in advance whether the child would be a boy or a girl I did them a great service. At the same time I did my duty to my king, for these warrior women used to attack and raid our

caravans as they passed through their territory and they inflicted heavy losses on our commerce. I managed to appease them by sharing this wisdom with them, and their attacks ceased." Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ became very interested in travelling to those lands but the man said, "If you wish to travel, take my advice and go to another place. These women are different from any other women on earth. They are the sworn enemies of all men. If you go to visit them, they will surely burn you, kill you or even eat you up, so great is their hatred of men. I will tell you of other places I have seen on my journeys." He told Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ about the lands he had seen, Jannatabād and the great mountain on which the Ark of Nūḥ had landed. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ remembered the stories his father had told him when he was young. But he knew that he was not free to travel and that his place was with his people for the moment. He released the man who had told him these tales and he returned to the palace of the enemy king.

This king was disheartened by the failure of his campaign and he took counsel with his advisors and soothsayers. Their chief, Turāth, was a very wicked and power-hungry man who was capable of long-term planning. He spoke thus to his king, "O my king, you will never defeat these people who believe in the One God by force of arms. They stand firm together and do not betray one another. Their high moral code protects them and they will face any enemy undaunted. They never lie, their conduct is impeccable and they know no fear. We must seek a different means in order to defeat them." "And how should we do this, O Turāth?" asked the king. "I am reminded of a rock. Just think how a little drop of water falling upon it gently, steadily, year after year, gradually melts it away, whereas brute force achieves nothing. In this way we should proceed against those people. It is the only chance we have of vanquishing them. This will be our task: to implant in them all manners of bad character. We will bring to them drink and gambling, the lust for women, dishonesty and cheating — and you will see that within a space of ten years perhaps their virtuous ways will be eradicated. They will have become every bit as bad as the people of Ayyūb before them; in that way we can destroy them.

However this plan of ours must remain a secret. Leave it to me to select a few trusted men from among the soothsayers and priests and we will accomplish this task for you." The king was a lazy man, he agreed and issued orders. Then he withdrew into his palace to enjoy the remaining years of his life in luxury, leaving the work of corruption to his servant Turāth.

Turāth wasted no time and gathered about him a small group of associates; seven of his most trusted apprentices. He explained the matter to them in terms of great urgency, saying that if they took no action against the town of Qudsiyya, in times to come the whole land would be converted to the religion of the one God and they, the priests of the idols, would be left penniless and loathed. He reminded them of the time of Ayyūb ﷺ who had toppled their chief idol from the temple on the hill and made a laughing stock and a ridicule of them all. Then he laid out his plan to them, "It is no use to march our armies against them. We must feed them the poison slowly, one gulp at a time. The young people must not know that it is poison they are being fed. They must believe it is medicine and a good thing. For the youth of a town resembles the centre-post of a tent: if rats and beavers slowly gnaw at it, the tent will eventually collapse, burying beneath it all that are within. This must be our course of action. The first thing to do is this: We must try to prevent them from attending their rites of worship, for the more they pray the less likely they are to let go of their habits. The most effective means of distracting them is money. Money has tremendous power. When they come into town to trade with us, we must try to instill envy of the rich in the hearts of the poorer ones, and greed and desire for more material possessions in the hearts of the wealthy. We must make them dissatisfied with their lot. If we succeed in estranging them from their prayers, their faith will weaken and the bonds between them will crack and loosen. Their hopes will be turned only towards material gain and profit and in that way, we will have won the first round."

Then Turāth summed up for them the founding principles of the faith of Ayyūb ﷺ; That there is One God, Allah, who

Himself is unborn and who does not sire any other being, but is the Creator of all things. He is not a man-made invention but an unimaginable, unseen Entity. There is continuity of life beyond death and on a certain day known to Him alone, everyone will be called to account for his deeds and reward and punishment will be meted out in accordance with each man's actions. Those believing in these tenets fear their Lord and nothing else on earth. They obey Him absolutely. They give *zakāt*, the poor rate, on what they have lawfully earned, amass not excessive riches and tell no lies. They heed and respect the words of their elders and die happily in a battle which they know to be a holy war. They commit no adultery, do not drink or gamble, and preserve their health by observing strict cleanliness. They do not know hate or envy, nor slanderous gossip among themselves and are always willing to help out those who are in a weaker position.

When he had finished explaining all this to the priests, one among their number could not hide his thoughts and he said, "All you have told us just now sounds very excellent. If all men were to act in such a way, no evil would remain on the face of the earth and man would live in a paradisiacal world." The head priest Turāth turned on him, unleashing his anger, "O you ignorant one! You and I, we all are humans and many are our deeds! The order of the world is such that there are always two groups, no more: the dominant and the dominated, the rulers and the servants. What then of our position as priests? Sometimes we are in power, sometimes we are of the subservient class. The most important thing for us is to retain our power and influence. In the order of Ayyūb there is no room for us and we should have no authority. It is not a question of angering the idols, as we always say, for tell me truly: who of you actually believes in these things? Who believes that these statues we have fashioned have any power of their own?" The young priests knew in their hearts that Turāth was speaking the truth and they all hung their heads and were silent. Turāth smiled to himself and continued, "Your silence confirms my words. Everything is just for show, a spectacle for the people, an excuse

and an invention. Man thinks of nothing but his own advantage and profit. I speak to you openly now. Leave these silly idols, and never mind about their invisible God either. Look around and you will see that mankind comes into being all of its own accord and the person of sound mind is the only thing worth worshipping. If you follow my way, the whole world will soon be brought to worship us and we will be the supreme rulers. Myself, I have grown old, but I am mindful of you who are young and designated to become my successors."

These and many similar words he spoke and they sufficed to awaken the lust or power in the hearts of the young apprentices. When he was sure of their support for his evil designs, he laid before them the plan for action: "To begin with it is enough if we work through the marketplace where they come to do their trading. There you and your helpmates will meet them and pass out the cups of poison, little by little. Sometimes you will talk to them of freedom, sometimes of gambling, drink and women. A drunk man will always drift towards women and a gambler will always seek to make up his losses, and he will have to lie to his parents and elders when he returns home without any gains. When nothing is left he will resort to stealing. In the end, he will not stop short of murder, be it his own father, mother or brother, and he will raid and plunder the passing caravans. In short, their conditions will change within a short while and of their faith nothing will remain." The seven apprentices saw that their chief Turāth was right again. "Now you know what is your task, but remember that it requires tact and delicacy. You must not frighten them away by being too blunt. In the beginning, great patience is required of you and your methods must be subtle." So the spreaders of evil were sent out to do their work and they did it well. Within a space of five years, they had already worked a good deal of corruption and when they went to report to their chief Turāth, his envious heart was well satisfied.

These changes had not escaped the notice of Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ and his brother Heymel, who were well aware that fewer and fewer people came to the mosque to attend worship, whereas

before everyone, young and old, had concentrated there in order not to miss the blessings of prayer. Now only a few of the steadfast believers remained and most of them were old men and women. None of the young people bothered to come anymore. This was a bad sign to the brothers, for they knew that without the support of the younger generation the faith was doomed to die out. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام himself, was about thirty years of age. One day the brothers came together to discuss what could be done about this. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام said to Heymel, "I sense heavy clouds of darkness hanging over us. We must find out the cause and fight it. Our youth is becoming estranged from us." His brother agreed and told him that he had already decided on the action he was going to take. "I know you will not like it, but I have decided to deal harshly with those I find guilty of transgressing the law. I will not let this whole community of believers fall into the hands of Shayṭān, as our father Ādam did aforetime. The rebellion must be quelled while it is still in its weak beginnings." Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام was repelled by the idea of force and tried to dissuade his brother, "You may think that you are acting reasonably and correctly. You may believe that you can prevent the poison from spreading by cutting back the tree. But in doing so, you will only help to increase the evil. If you cut the diseased branches the worms will spread all the faster in the remaining root-stock. That will never do. You must find the root cause of all this trouble and act against it." "Oh, you are painting too black a picture, my brother Bishr, things are not as bad as all that." said Heymel. "No," replied Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام, "I am wide awake and I see evil on the increase. More and more young people are doing what is forbidden with each new day. Soon you will see it gaining speed and spreading rapidly, even to our remotest villages. Your harshness in dealing with the isolated evildoers will avail you nothing. You may vanquish an outward enemy with the sword but never an inward foe. It is happening in every household. The enemy is very close to us, poisoning their hearts." "O brother," said Heymel, "how long is it since our mother has died?" "It is not very long since," replied Dhu l-Kifl. "Did not our mother will on her deathbed that

you should get married and settle down?" retorted Heymel. "I have not had the time to think of myself yet in these troubled times, I am too busy with care for the community," replied Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام. "Well, I and all the people with me are waiting for these glad tidings, brother."

With this, Heymel turned to leave. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام stopped him and said, "It seems you give little weight to my words, brother, this is not a time for merrymaking." But Heymel went off to look after his fields and left his brother deep in thought. By the time of the afternoon prayer, he had reached his decision. "My brother is right," he thought, "it will not do to simply remain here and wait. I must do something. I will go out and see for myself what is wrong, and I will try to address those working against the will of the Lord with words of reason." He set out on his way and before long he met the headman of a village who was very worried about the spread of mischief in his community. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام explained to him that he was out to find the root cause of the corruption and that he intended to confront those guilty of misconduct. The headman advised him to disguise himself and then to go about and mix with people. Then he should surely find out what was amiss.

Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام did so and wandered cross-country, passing through fields and gardens that had been fruitful and yielded plenty in the past. Now, he found them neglected and shriveled. He saw also that the flocks were decreasing in number, for many ewes had not given birth this year — signs to Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام that the blessing on the land was drying up. He also noticed that the people he met, working in the fields, were all old men and women. There was no sign of the younger folk. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام spoke to one old woman of his acquaintance. She recognized him, dropped her tools and invited him into her house. He said to her, "It is nearly nightfall, how is it you have not gone home yet?" "My house is far from my fields," she explained, "and I have not yet finished the day's work." "Where then, are your sons and daughters-in-law?" asked Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام. The old woman sighed and her eyes filled with tears. "Things are not as they used to be, Dhu l-Kifl. Your brother knows and I see that you

understand. Is there nothing you can do about this? We have lost control over our sons and daughters. They have no more respect and they do not listen to us anymore." Then she gazed into the distance towards a slight hillock on which stood three great trees and she muttered almost inaudibly to herself, "There they go again." "Who goes where, and what for?" asked Dhu l-Kifl in surprise. "Who else but our sons and daughters! All the young people go to this place at night to revel, then they spend the days asleep in our tents and houses." "And what do they do there all night?" "O son of our prophet, what do the owls and jackals do at night? Our blessed country is falling into ruins and there is no one who might do anything about it. Even your brother Heymel is not as he used to be. He is busy with his affairs of government and thinks little of our needs and complaints. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ did not reply to this charge but asked, "All this must have had a beginning, there must have been a first time for all these things. Can you tell me what happened?" The old woman said, "That is easy to say. Last year I sent my son to the market along with our neighbour's son as usual, to buy and to sell. He used to stay out only for one night. This time he went again and stayed away for much longer than he used to and when he returned his condition was deplorable. All the light was gone from his face. His complexion was sallow and his knees were trembling. He hung his head when I asked him about his experiences and gave the impression of a guilty man. At first I thought he must be ill but he had no complaint. He had brought home no proceeds from his sales, saying he had been attacked and robbed on the way. I believed him. He set out another time and again he returned empty-handed. Slowly, I learned from my neighbours that their children were in a similar condition, and we have now found out that there is a plot. There are certain forces in the capital working against us. They have begun to feed us poison in order to corrupt us; they are using our innocent children, turning them away from the straight path. And they are succeeding. The tide has turned on us very quickly."

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ was highly alarmed and said, "We have wasted a lot of time already, the iron must be pounded while it is

hot." But he still was skeptical of the idea of employing fire to fight fire even though the old woman had urged him to show a strong hand. Our children cannot be counted among the believers anymore," she said, "go and see for yourself how evil has overtaken them." Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ said, "As long as the riverbed has not completely filled with mud, it may yet be possible to clean it with fresh running water, and restore the stream to its former purity." "O Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, you are still young and full of confidence. You have not seen what we old ones have seen and your love for your people is unbroken. How long will it be until you will succeed your father as a prophet?" "Only Allah Almighty knows that," answered Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ and, thanking the woman for her hospitality, he went on his way.

Before it had grown quite dark, he met a young man who wished to speak to him urgently. He told Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ the full story of what was happening to the village youth through foreign influences, how they were being seduced to idol worship and all forms of immoral behaviour on their trips to the city. He said it would not be long before there was an uprising in the villages. The young men had long gambled away all they possessed and their new advisors had taught them that the goods of the rich were lawful to them, just as they had made everything that was forbidden lawful also. This was the fuel of the rebellion under the trees on the hilltop. "But don't let them see you there," the young man entreated Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ. "For they know no more restraint and I fear for your life." "Never worry," said Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ and he went on towards the fires burning upon the hill.

There he heard men speaking in loud voices and when he came to them he recognized the young men of the village, and they knew him too. He gave them his greetings of peace and asked them what they were doing here at this hour. They were a little hesitant to answer and finally one of them retorted, asking him what he was doing there among them. "I have come to see you," answered Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ and climbed atop a great rock. "This is the son of our prophet," the boys whispered to one another, "and his father Ayyūb ﷺ prayed that propheth-

ood might be passed on to him. Perhaps the time has now come and he is here to make this announcement to us." There was a stranger amongst them who now stepped forth and spoke out, "I thought you were finally going to rid yourself of all this nonsense and become reasonable people, but here you go again, babbling about prophets and prophecies and predictions and that invisible god; were you not going to rid yourself of all those restrictions, and of those who impose them upon you? Were you not going to claim your birthright of freedom, and choose to do what you like? Why are you suddenly talking of prophets and wizards and the like?" They said, "This man is the son of our prophet. We dare not act against him." "You will run into trouble with the idols, for they will be wrathful. Have they not made everything lawful to you that these prophets forbade you? Did they not teach you that man is born with free will and the right to live as he pleases?"

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ then spoke up and addressed them, "You are not of our people. You are a stranger amongst us." "So what of it," said the other, "I am of mankind and I have come to take my pleasure with these youths here and to free them from the prison in which you have trapped them like apes." "And what do you claim that they are missing then?" challenged Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ. "In your system everything enjoyable is forbidden. It is forbidden to drink, to play games, to have fun with the girls, to supplement one's own funds with those of one's neighbour. Everything you have made *ḥarām*. These boys are missing all the fun in life. They are just like trained apes, monkeys running on the leash by which you lead them, not like men of reason and free will," replied the stranger.

Now Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ had heard for himself the words of the insolent seducer and he trembled with rage. He prayed to the Lord for support and the power of self-control. Then he turned in the direction of the Ka'ba and spoke to the young men long and earnestly, "In this direction," he said, pointing towards Mecca "lies the Ka'ba, the first house of worship. He has sent prophets to mankind from the time of our father Ādam ﷺ onwards, to all nations, be they large or small. All prophets have

called men to the same goal, and man has always been ordered to do good, never evil. No one becomes a slave by doing good and honest work. Work, too, is a form of worship and it can be a pleasure. It behoves man not to worship what he has made with his own hands. The Creator is always above and beyond his own creation. All created beings are only signs of the greatness of the Lord and Him we must all obey."

But the stranger pursued the argument, "What sort of god is it who implants in man the taste for all sorts of enjoyments, then makes them forbidden to him?" Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ answered him, "And what good has come out of all your teachings? What has become of these hopeful and prosperous young people? They do not sleep at night in order to squander their possessions and to pursue their sordid pleasures. In the daytime they have not the strength left to do their honest work. Their faces have become faded and aged before their time. They rise not before noon and are busy only at night to drown themselves in drink. Is this what you call enjoyment of life? Is not honest work a pleasure? And what is sweeter than the fruits of lawful gain? What is more tasteful than to awake at daybreak as fresh as a budding rose and to thank the Lord with a prayerful heart for another day of His Creation? Allah has sent us upon the earth so that we might be His servants and vicegerents here. We belong to one nation, the family of man. It is a great degradation to believe only in this brief life in the present world. No real joy remains for a man who believes he has nothing to expect after death. Only his greed will be increased and he will seek to grab whatever he can on the face of the earth before he has to leave it. The source of light and happiness is the belief in the continuity of life and the eternity of the Lord. O my friends, this man is not of our people, and his intentions towards you are not for your benefit. He is an emissary of a foreign power which seeks to destroy the happy life of contentment we have been leading and lay to waste our beautiful country; his motives are hatred and envy. Do not be deceived by him! For years they have been working towards this goal. We know of them and of their ulterior designs. They will tell you it is ridiculous to give

poor dues, they will make fun of you when you distribute your wealth in charity, they will prevent you from mutually helping each other out. They will tell you to hide away your money and hoard it in secret. They will tell you it is useless to go out and work, they will ridicule you for respecting your elders, they will make out that those appointed over you are tyrants and unjust rulers and that the respect and dignity they command is absurd. The peace and contentment of yore — what intoxicating cup can restore it to you, what night spent in illicit dissipation can give you back your peace of mind, and what idolatrous rite can fill your heart as a single sincere moment of prayer to the Almighty can? Truly, what Allah has forbidden has been withheld from us for a good reason. It is for our own good that we are prevented from indulging in every low desire which only brings increased suffering upon man. It only robs a man of his strength and of the power to enjoy what Allah has made lawful to him. Search your inner selves and never doubt that there is a way back for you. Come over here, stand by my side and let us pray together, and by the morning you will see that all this has passed like a nightmare. Your light will never be extinguished by the performance of holy deeds. This stranger and his confederates have spread among you with one clear aim in mind: to increase the appetite of your insatiable nafs. What have they not tempted you with? Crazy and degraded pastimes, drunkenness and depravity. They have wasted your time with coarse jesting and general mischief, teaching you to lie, cheat and steal, shying away not even from murder and rebellion. They have bred in you greed, avarice and miserliness, dishonesty, ungratefulness and indifference towards lofty spiritual goals, and your state has become thoroughly miserable."

The stranger understood that his position was being undermined. He began to shout: "How long are you going to stand listening to this foolish prattle? The others are waiting for us. Everything is ready and prepared for our grand coup, you cannot back out now, you will make fools of yourselves!" Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام tried once more to warn them, "I am not talking to you of my own accord. There is a power backing me up and it is my

holy duty to lead you back onto the straight way. I wish no harm to befall you and I am not acting out of self-interest. It is my conscience prompting me to speak to you. Do not follow that man. it will be your undoing and one day you will be filled with regret. Turn back and repent now, for Allah will forgive you. Do you believe when you have taken over these lands which are not rightfully yours that you will be left in peace to enjoy what you have appropriated? Oh no, the neighbouring kings are watching you as waiting lions, and they will begin to roar as soon as they are sure of your weakness. Then they will move against you and take everything from your hands and you will be led from here in chains into slavery. They are not your friends and they know not mercy. One day, I fear, I will meet you again in the slave-market, but then it will be too late for regrets. You are deceiving only yourselves!"

But it was already too late for all of Dhu l-Kifl's admonitions. The poison was already coursing though their veins. Too many nights had they spent in drunkenness and they could no longer understand the import of Dhu l-Kifl's speech. They were annoyed by his words, to be sure, but the only remedy they could think of was drink. The stranger was well aware of this and from a hidden storage place he pulled out three wine skins and opened them, calling to the youths to come and strengthen themselves for the deed they were about to do. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ watched them with mixed feelings of disgust and pity, but he saw there was no more he could say to them. He had to worry about his own safety now. For when the stranger saw that the wine had gone to their heads, he said to them, "O my friends, even if that miserable prophet of doom be the brother of your kind, now is the time to put an end to his ravings." "Shall we kill him, then?" they asked, ready for anything in their intoxication. "No," said the stranger, "let us just take him prisoner, for his brother Heymel will certainly pay considerable ransom to have such a valuable hostage released. In that way we are in a strong bargaining position and will have attained our ends without even having to fight for them." A great cry of drunken enthusiasm arose and they all got up to seize Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ.

However, he had disappeared. They searched for a long time among the rocks but could find no trace of him. They finally concluded that it must have been another one of his 'magic tricks'.

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ had anticipated their intentions and slipped away unnoticed and descended into the village. He noticed that no lights were burning and he found the people there already expecting an attack. He confirmed their fears and informed them of what they had to expect from their own children. Though it saddened their hearts to have to fight against their own flesh and blood, they prepared to defend themselves and the village headman took up the command. Before long the rebellious mob stormed down into the village, with loud and barbarous cries, and a fierce battle ensued between fathers and sons. Even mothers were forced to fight against their own sons. There were many casualties, but the raid was not successful. Towards the morning an armed force sent by Heymel arrived, and at the sight of the soldiers the insurgents dispersed and hid in the hills. Heymel and his men pursued them, but they returned without prisoners. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ was worried that he might have put them all to death, but Heymel said, "We could find none of them. They have all run over to the enemies' lines."

A week or so passed. Then one day, a messenger came running into the village of Besniye and brought news that the Assyrians were going to war against the Egyptians. Now all the villages under Heymel's leadership were beholden to the Assyrians and he was sure of their victory. But before long they beheld in the distance a long train of people, who turned out to be refugees from the more distant villages. They were so exhausted from their flight that they could hardly speak. When they finally told their story, there was a general outcry and people were dismayed. It appeared that their sons after their futile rebellion had run over to the enemy and betrayed their own people. They had directed them into the territories and shown them ways into it that only they could know. The armies had fallen on their lands and ravaged and ransacked all they could

lay hands on. The survivors had fled and were moving north to seek shelter in the city, before the enemy cut off the road.

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ and his brother took hurried counsel and decided that they too should take advantage of the darkness and lead the small band of believers into safety, rather than leaving them to fall into the hands of the ruthless enemy. But Heymel hesitated for he was attached to his lands. He argued with his brother, "Perhaps it is better we stay in our places. When they come upon us we can always pretend that we are on their side and worship their idols and they will leave us in peace. Then after they are gone we can continue to live as we are accustomed to do." Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ was not pleased by these words. "I have always known that it would come to this one day. You are willing to sell out your faith and religion for the sake of maintaining your power and possessions. But it will not be as you expect, for once the filth of idolatry has entered a country, it cannot easily be dispelled. You will be very sorry in the end." "It is easy for you who are free and unfettered to speak like this, but I have a family and many responsibilities that bind me to this land. I cannot just do as I please." Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ resigned himself. "I leave it to you, you may count on the justice of the Egyptians, Hittites or Assyrians, it makes no difference to whom you lose your light. As for myself, I will head in the direction of the Ka'ba, and whoever wishes may follow me there. Perhaps our destination is not as green and luscious as our homeland, but at least our faith will remain intact."

No more than forty people, mostly old men and women were prepared to follow Dhu l-Kifl into exile and they swore by the light of their eyes not to stray from the way of truth as long as there was life in them. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ took leave of his brother and led his band into the mosque to pray. He went and visited his mother's grave and prayed fervently for the Lord to give him guidance as to where he should lead his people. Then they set out under cover of darkness and hid themselves in a dense wood, for the enemy had come very close. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ let his followers rest there, while he climbed atop a large rock to pray. He was not sure of what he should do; his people preferred to

go to the city where they would more easily be able to begin a new life but Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ feared they would succumb to the various influences there and lose their purity of heart. On the other hand he understood that the life of hardship he offered them in the harsh deserts around Mecca could not be very attractive to them. Thus he debated with himself and his Lord and while he was in such meditations, he was overcome by a great drowsiness and his soul departed to the world of spirits.

Towards the morning he saw a significant vision. His own difficult situation appeared to him and he felt its hopeless weight. Suddenly something gave way and he had the unexpected sensation of ease and breathed a lightness in the air which was as fragrant as a rose-garden in the dew of morning. He heard a voice calling him, "O Dhu l-Kifl, glad tidings to you, the Lord of the Worlds has chosen you to be His prophet! Take your people and lead them to the city of Shām! The guidance of the Lord is with you." Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ awoke full of wonder but at the same time he was doubtful as to whether it had not been a false vision inspired by the enemy of man, the accursed Shayṭān, or even whether one of the people had whispered into his ear while he slept in order to make him take them to the city where they wanted to go. He saw them all fast asleep and he called upon his Lord in his heart to make him safe from error and falsehood. Then, the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ appeared to him and confirmed his calling. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ was filled with light and joy. Thus, the prayer of his father Ayyūb ﷺ was granted and his son Dhu l-Kifl became his successor. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān:

„And Ismā'īl, Idrīs, Dhu l-Kifl. Each was of the patient. And We admitted them into Our mercy. They were of the righteous." [The Prophets, 21:85–86]

„And make mention of Ismā'īl, and Alyasa', and Dhu l-Kifl. All are of the chosen." [Ṣād, 38:48]

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ arose and went to bathe in a nearby stream. Then, he awakened the believers and told them to perform their ablutions for it was the time to pray. They looked at him in surprise for his whole aspect had somehow changed. They

prayed together and Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ ordered them to gather fruits in the forest for their breakfast. This they did but even as they ate and prepared for the road ahead of them none could take his eyes off Dhu l-Kifl, the prophet ﷺ. At last he rose to his feet, smiled at them and said, "O my brothers, I believe you are all sensing that a change has come over me and you are feeling the influence of the Divine Inspiration that has come to me this very night." "Yes," they all agreed, "there is a light in your eyes and a power in your speech that we have not perceived before this time." "It is true," said Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, "for this morning the angel came to me and revealed to me my prophethood and from this day on all our steps will be guided by the Almighty. So take heart and rejoice with me. Allah has accepted your heart's desire and has commanded us to proceed towards Damascus." All the believers fell down then and performed a prostration of thanks. "Perhaps it will be a great trial for us to go there," continued Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, "for we will encounter strange circumstances and all manner of unaccustomed things, both good and bad. Shām is a busy place and many different people come together there. Be not deceived by anything you may see there. The devil always accompanies us and the only road to escape from his wiles is prayer. Whenever you are distressed, remember to pray. That is the only way to repel his assaults." "O prophet of Allah, you may depend on us," the believers said. "O my brothers, that is what all people of all times have said to their prophets. They gave their word only to fall back on it later and demand miracles as proof or as an excuse not to carry out an order. They have always accused their prophets of sorcery and the like. There is no creature weaker than man and man is unjust and hasty. I already wonder what sort of miracle you will be demanding of me, for no prophet has come whose people did not make such a demand of him." Hearing these words, the believers grew sad. They said, "Have you so little trust in us, O Dhu l-Kifl? You have hardly begun your mission and already you speak to us with bitterness. The light we perceive upon your face this day is enough proof for us. We will follow it, undaunted. Besides, is it not miracle enough to

witness a man who survives without food and sleep, who only fasts and prays — this is a continuous miracle which we are witnessing, and may Allah grant us patience."

They were about to set out on their journey when, they heard a whistle coming from the forest. When they answered, the headman of the village stepped out into the clearing. He said to them, "Your brother Heymel sends me to you to inform you that you might return to the village, for the danger is past. The enemy has passed us by and the Assyrians will leave us alone. We can continue to lead our lives and worship as we are used to. Come back with me, for who will lead us in prayer if not you?" Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام explained to the headman that he had become a prophet during the night and that the Lord's irrevocable order was for him to go to Shām. The believers stood and hung their heads, confused at this turn of events. "How do we know you speak the truth?" they asked of the headman, "how do we know we will not be harmed if we return?" The man reassured them over and over. The people were homesick already and yearned for the homes they had left. "There is another thing I must tell you," said the headman, "if you come back with me, chances are that you may grow very rich all at once." "How is that?" the people wished to know. "Our overlords have promised to pay us for every object left from the time of Ayyūb عليه السلام. They will give us its weight in gold. Whatever is left from the time of his affliction, his rags, the straw on which he lay, the jug from which he drank, the dressings he applied to his wounds. For all this they will pay us in gold."

In vain, Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام tried to counsel them against returning. The man's words had seemed false to him and the last offer of gold sounded to him like a contemptuous jest with the simpleminded. "Did I not hear you say to me a moment ago that you would follow me wherever I went, be it to the end of the world? If I threw myself into the river or off a cliff, would you come after me? Allah has commanded me to go to Shām and there I shall go. Whoever comes with me let him come now, and whoever returns, that is his will. But be warned, in this message there is falsehood and you will find nothing on

your return but charred ruins, and only the dead are there to receive you." But no matter what he said to them, their hearts were bent on returning to their homes and they chose to believe the messenger. Their ways separated and Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام was left by himself on the road to Damascus.

One day he stopped by the roadside in order to say his prayers when he heard a rustling sound near him in the bushes. A man emerged, muttering under his breath, "Nothing remains, no life, no soul, not stone upon stone, no trace of what used to be." Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام looked up and recognized the man as a merchant from Qudsiyya who had left the village a long time ago to settle in Shām. Hearing of the enemy invasion, he had returned to the village to see what he could rescue of his belongings. He had found the whole land burnt and devastated. The houses had been leveled to the ground and all the villagers killed or led off into slavery. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام thought sadly of his group of believers and how they had been deceived, and he wondered what fate they had met. Then he spoke to the man and told him that he had become a prophet and that the Lord had revealed for him to go to Shām. "I don't really believe in these things," said the man, "however, I like your looks and your manner, and to tell you the truth, I am looking for a husband for my one and only daughter. I see you are a worthy person and would give her to you in marriage if you accompany me to Shām." "But I am just as you see me here," said Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام, "I own nothing but the traveling cloak you see me in. I have nothing to my name and no skill wherewith to make a living to keep a wife and family." The man said, "Then you may look after my sheep for five years." "I know nothing about herding sheep," answered Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام. "I will employ you as a shopkeeper," said the man . "About business I know even less," said Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام. "Then you may work in my gardens and fields for me," said the man. So Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام agreed to look after the man's gardens for five years and receive the hand of his daughter with all her dowry in return.

As they stood talking, the sky suddenly darkened as if a dark rain cloud were passing overhead. But it was no cloud of rain.

It was a swarm of locusts so dense that it obscured the sunlight. The locusts came from the direction of Qudsiyya and the men knew that not a green blade of grass remained standing once the locusts had passed over a place. The man decried this as a further catastrophe to befall his homeland but Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ said, "O my friend, the locusts are also a blessing to some people. For I have heard from my father Ayyūb ﷺ that after having eaten their fill they fly towards the great desert and the poor Bedouins living there catch them and prize them highly as food. They collect and dry them and keep them stored for the meagre years to come." "Oh," said the merchant, "if that is so, then we are in luck, for each of these insects then, means money. Tell me, how do they eat them?" "They roast them over a fire," answered Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ. "All right, we will try it and see if these things are really edible. They picked up a few locusts that had been blown against the rocks, made a small fire and roasted the insects. After having sampled them and having found them not too bad, he said to Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, "This will now be our deal since it was your idea: I give you 50 percent and that will make you a rich man. No need for you to be my gardener now We will collect these insects in great numbers and dry them, then we'll sell them to the Bedouins living in the desert. This way we will make a lot of money and you won't have to wait five years to marry my daughter. You can pay me back in time when our new enterprise has become established." Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ agreed to all the man said. He had seen the signs of the Lord who had opened this way for him.

Thus camel-caravans were prepared and sent out loaded with dried locusts and sold to the Bedouins in the desert. Their profits were good, for there was no scarcity of locusts. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ received his share and was married to the merchant's daughter.

Ten years passed. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ had by now established himself and his family in an area around Damascus. He had sons and daughters, and his own house. His gardens and fields bore fruit and he became prosperous. He was now forty years old. One day, he looked out from his house and beheld a spectacle

which touched his heart strangely. A procession of slaves was being led by their driver and they came to a halt on the empty lot next to Dhu l-Kifl's house. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ had seen many slave caravans led by in his time but never had he seen any group of people more miserable than these. They were about twenty men and women and they were fair-skinned though their skin had been so burnt by the sun and wind that you could scarcely tell their colour. They barely had rags to cover their nakedness and their backs were scarred horribly form the cruel lashings they had received as they were driven on mercilessly. They were so emaciated and weak that they could hardly walk, yet they were made to carry burdens upon their heads as they tottered along. Their drivers yelled at them to keep singing and though they scarcely had any breath left in them they sang as they were ordered. Their songs were the songs of fire-worshippers. They praised the fire as a divinity and as the supreme Lord who creates and destroys. When they were allowed to halt, they threw off their loads and fainted more than they lay down. Their drivers deliberated what to do with them and spoke among themselves, "Look at them, what shall we do — they are scarcely human anymore! We cannot lead them into the city in this condition, we must send word to the owners to decide what shall be done with them." And it was true, their nails had grown as long as claws. their hair was tangled and matted, and they had not washed for many months — worse than any animal ever kept in captivity.

The longer Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ watched, the more he felt moved to do something for these most wretched people but he could think of no good way to approach the matter. Whilst he was trying to make up his mind, the slave-driver came to him and demanded in no uncertain terms to be made his guest. While he fed him, Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ asked the man about the unfortunates outside. "Well, what about them, they are the left-overs, we have sold the rest. What is to become of them. I do not know. It is up to their owners. Either we succeed in selling them off or else we lead them to the temple to be sacrificed to the sacred flames so that it might be counted in our favour by the gods."

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ listened and said not a word. Later, when the man was leaving, he said to Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, "I have some place to go now. I will leave the slaves here in your care. They are bound hand and foot. They are too weak to flee." When he was gone Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ said to his wife, "Go and cook a soup for this miserable lot and we will feed them for the love of Allah Almighty." When the soup was ready, Dhu l-Kifl took it down to them himself and gave them each a plate of hot broth and a loaf of bread. They looked at him in surprise and ate hungrily but there was also distrust and suspicion in their regard. They were not accustomed to kindness and even in this unexpected act of charity they suspected a hidden barb. Their captors tormented them day and night and had robbed their hearts of hope. They fed them no food at all but made them eat the flesh of their brothers who died along the way, thus degrading them even beyond the level of animals. They had become as wary as wild beasts and expected nothing but a new form of cruelty.

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ withdrew and when it was night he stepped out onto his balcony to pray. "O Lord, " he cried, "save these unfortunates, for are they not human beings and Your chosen servants?" One of the slaves below was awake and watching, and suddenly he cried out to his fellows, "It is he! I recognize him, I am sure!" The moon had hidden itself in a cloud but Dhu l-Kifl's form shone as if by a light of its own, clearly visible in the darkness of the night. All the others awoke and told him to quiet down otherwise there would be more trouble for them. "No, I have recognized him," insisted the first one, "see how his hair is parted in the middle. There is no doubt! He is the one who gave us advice long ago, when he stood upon that hill and preached to us, but, alas, we did not heed his words. Do you not remember how he said to us, "O you who are ready to sell your fathers and mothers, one day you will know who is your enemy and I shall not be surprised to see you again one day led in chains through the slave markets of Damascus, nor should you be surprised, for you have been warned! Ah, how true his words were, had we only known then!" Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ turned away from them and hid himself. He did not wish to humiliate

them even further. When the overseer returned from his errands, Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ made a bid to buy the remaining slaves off him. "Think again, my good man," said the slave-driver, "what use could these bags of skin and bones be to you? They are beyond restoration, you are buying only dead bodies." But Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ insisted and paid the price that was asked. Then he was handed the keys to the locks on their chains. The slave-drivers hastily made off, one saying to the other, "Quickly, let us leave, before that foolish man realizes what sort of rubbish he has purchased and wants his money back."

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ released the slaves from their chains and revealed himself to them. Then he gave to each his freedom, saying, "As free men we are brothers." He settled them on his land and each ploughed and tilled a corner of it, and they built themselves huts. They married and had families and the Lord blessed them and showed them His forgiveness. In time, they founded a small new village on the outskirts of Damascus. Often they went about the slave-markets and found their own tribesmen who, like themselves, had been enslaved during the wars that had raged. They bought and freed them. All of them felt great shame and humiliation when they were brought before Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ, the prophet whose warnings they had not heeded in time. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ showed them only kindness and encouraged them to renew their faith and to repent sincerely. Allah forgave them and they became the best of Muslims.

Damascus was then a trade centre and a town of lively commerce. Merchants from all over the world used to come there for business. The community of Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ became well-known among them for their honesty and trustworthiness and word spread far and wide, so that many foreign merchants preferred to do business with them. They worked hard and their fields and gardens also prospered and they were blessed with health and good fortune. As always, when the Lord has blessed one people more than another, there are those who are envious and cannot tolerate the well-being of the others. So it was with the people of Shām. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ had not converted a single person among them to his faith, and he had been all alone until

he found his lost tribesmen and brought them to repentance. In Damascus at that time there were many different cults and sects. People worshipped the sun, the moon, the fire, and each group tried to convert the other by force. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام had tried to preach in Damascus, and people would listen to him as they would listen to any storyteller in the market-place, for his speech was beautiful and spellbinding. However, they only shook their heads to his earnest appeals and soon went their ways, no-one taking his message seriously. Now when the merchants of the town saw that Dhu l-Kifl's small community was flourishing, envy entered their hearts and they said, "This man is bad news. He and his freed slaves will soon take all our customers away from us. We must drive him out of town by some means." They knew that the Assyrian king was well disposed towards Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام on account of his good reputation, but that the priests and soothsayers would like nothing better than to be rid of him, for they felt threatened by his purity and power. So the merchants turned to them. The priests went before the Assyrian king and spoke against Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام. "He is the only person who does not worship any of our gods and idols," they said, "he is gathering a growing following of freed slaves. He is a foreigner, an stranger, and we have understood his designs. He is preparing a base to take over power and to topple the throne. He is a danger to the state and should be dealt with immediately." But the king was reluctant to act against Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام because of the damage such a decree might do to the free trade of Damascus. He only sent word to Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام suggesting to him that he should leave and settle in another town.

The envoys came and brought Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام this news. He spoke to his opponents for a long time and tried to reason with them but was unable to melt their hearts of stone. At last he said to them, "As it is your wish, I shall go. But know that I am a prophet. Even if you do not believe in me. This is my final warning to you. The land from which a prophet is driven out will surely perish, it has always been so. This is the Lord's punishment and you will live to see it yet. You are driving me out of this thriving centre of trade for fear of losing your gain to me,

unwilling to share the bounties of the Lord in your hard-heartedness. The punishment of the Lord may come from where you least expect it, and when it happens and all your trade has come to a dead stop then you will remember my words."

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ had thought of leading his small following along with him but when he saw them content, peacefully enjoying their lives amidst their families and flourishing fields he had not the heart to uproot them once more and subject them to all the hardships and uncertainties of a vagrant life after all they had already suffered. So he gathered them all one last time and addressed them, "O my friends and brothers, O my very own family, I am leaving you and you must henceforth consider me as one who has died. I leave you the law of the Lord which you know, cling to it and live by it and do not revert to the evil ways of the people living around you, else you will fall into even greater misery than you have already known. You have known what it is to suffer and you have repented of your past wrongdoings. Beware of falling into the same trap again. Never give up your faith in Allah Almighty, no matter what the world may do to you. It is easy to slip down a slope which you have climbed with great difficulty, so be very careful and guard your steps. I leave it to you to choose a leader from among yourselves after I have gone and may you pursue the path of righteousness always." They asked him, "And where are you going? What shall we do if they drive us away from this land? Where shall we find you?" Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ answered, "Allah's earth is wide. Go and seek His bounties wherever you wish. As for my own path, I cannot say, for I am a prophet of the Lord and my coming and going rests only with Him. I would turn my face towards the Holy House of Allah, at Mecca, the first sanctuary of the Lord, but I will go wherever I am commanded."

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ made ready to travel and took leave of his family as if he were never to see them again. His father-in-law accompanied him the first stretch of the way and said to him, "O my beloved son, will you not forsake this foolishness? You had found rest and peace in this rich land and have a family that loves you and makes you happy. Why do you want to go off

now and tramp around in the wilderness? The road is full of dangers and unknown things. Why don't you make your peace with the priests and content yourself with worshipping what everybody else worships in this country? Is it really worth giving up all the good things in life for some invisible goal?" Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام was saddened by the words of his old friend who had become dear as a father to him and he prayed for him, as he said in parting, "I ask of the Lord to send you guidance and understanding. Perhaps we shall meet again before our time is done."

Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام set out for the south as the angel had revealed to him. When he reached the hills over looking Damascus, the sun was about to set. In the waning light the whole city was lit up as in a golden blaze and Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام had a vision. The people in the city appeared to him to be running around just as little black ants, in the darkness of their ignorance. He perceived his small band of believers as bright specks among them, but they were so very few. Then he saw hordes of big, black, poisonous ants falling upon them in great numbers and Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام felt great distress. He rubbed his eyes and prayed fervently that Allah might not let the few believers fall prey to the misguided a second time. "O Lord, grant that I should be together with them once more in my life," he cried. Then, he made his way in the growing darkness through the hills and when he looked back again he saw nothing but the black rocks.

The angel had revealed to him that he must follow the way of all prophets and travel, for there is great benefit in travel; it broadens one's scope and stretches the horizons of the mind. He travelled southwards along the coast. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام had been traveling for a year already when he reached the fruitful plains of Jericho. It was a blessed land but the inhabitants did not know whom to thank for the blessing. They were a wayward and rebellious folk. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام spoke to them and counseled them to acknowledge the Unity of Allah and to live in awe of Him. The people however, just rolled their eyes and mimicked him as though he were a madman. Finally, they drove him off with sticks and stones and threatened him with death if he were to persist in bothering them. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام wrapped himself

in patience and went on. There were times however, when he was overcome by his human nature; his heart would burst from longing for his family and friends and he burned with the pangs of loneliness and separation. But quickly he would recall that he was never truly alone, for when a man becomes completely immersed in the remembrance of his Lord with every cell of his body and every facet of his soul, how can he ever feel himself to be alone and a stranger? And how can he forget this, as long as he continues steadfast in his devotions and exercises remembrance?

One day, he reached the outskirts of a lovely village at nightfall and considered spending the night there. As he regarded the beauty of the land he was overcome with feeling for all the goodness Allah Almighty has given to His servants and with which He has filled this wide world. Suddenly, he heard a coughing sound from somewhere in the rocks to his left. He looked about but could not see anyone. The coughing stopped and Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام heard an angry voice saying, "Are a worse bunch of miserly villagers to be found anywhere in the whole world? I am lucky that I woke up quickly and saved myself from them." These words were followed by a burst of mad laughter and a snatch of song. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام was intrigued by these words and wished to see the speaker. He looked again among the rocks and found a man sitting, facing the North. He looked up when he saw Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام and said to him, "O traveller, I can see that you are about to make the same mistake that I made. Whatever you do, do not let the beauty and bounty of this land deceive you, do not go down into the village, for you will come to a sticky end there. Do not become bewitched by appearances, and congratulate yourself on having met me! What is your name?" "My name is Bishr, but they call me Dhu l-Kifl," he replied. "My name is Saha and I come from a village near the lake of Tut. Why are you headed north? What is your intention?" "I am under orders," answered Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام. "I am not a curious person, I will not ask you what your orders are, but I would like to know who has given you such orders, for surely he wishes your speedy demise!" said Saha. "No, in

that you are mistaken," said Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ. "When they are stoning you down there, then you will think differently," said Saha. "Look at me, Dhu l-Kifl, I used to be a big, fat man. After only three months of traveling, look what has become of me? For what does a hungry man do? He begins to live off himself!" "You are speaking strangely," said Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ. "Yes, and I would speak to you of stranger things yet, but I feel that you will not listen to my stories. Your mind is bent on going and mixing with those people who are of unrivaled meanness, deceitfulness and cruelty. Go your way then and I will go mine." As he turned to go, he heard the man laugh behind him a second time and it was a bitter, stinging laugh. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ was undaunted, He was driven on by the voice of his conscience and felt responsibility for these people who had no guidance.

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ descended and it was indeed as Saha had told him, he found himself among people even worse than those he had left behind. For when a man comes to worship Shayṭān what kind of evil will he not do? Any man worthy of the name would blush from shame at the mere mention of the devil's name. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ had not yet reached the village when he was stopped by men who claimed to be tax-collectors and demanded from him a fee for entering the village and breathing its air. If he were unable to pay he would have to work off his debt. At first Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ thought they must be joking but he soon realised how serious they were, when they brought him to their headman. "This man was found using and wearing out our road. He has no money and can only make up for our loss if he works for us for one week. The headman had another cause to add to this: "While listening to you, I have wasted so much of my precious time. The fee for that is another three days work." So within minutes of his stay in that village, Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ had already incurred debts enough to enslave him for ten days. He was no fool and he quickly understood that it was their intention to force him to labour for them according to their arguments. He was in effect their prisoner, for how can a man live without-breathing the air or setting his foot upon the ground? He was taken to the slaves' quarters and during his stay there

he witnessed the unhappy lot of many a caravan that passed through that place unawares. The headman would demand a high price from them as the rent of the air used up by men and beasts and they were made to pay him all their wares and trading goods. Then they had to sell themselves as slaves. This was a form of highway-robbery only under a different name. The people of that place also behaved no better towards their own kith and kin and they even cheated the idols which they worshipped. When they sacrificed an animal, they would first supply themselves with meat and when they had eaten their fill, they took the bones and offered them to the idols.

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ then took to preaching among his fellow slaves and he found an open ear there and converted many of them to his faith. The villagers soon found out about this and would have put him and his converts to death had not Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ been warned on time and aided by his loyal supporters. He managed to cut his chains and flee the area. He travelled further north and reached Antakya, only to find that even if people there were not as bad as the ones he had just left, their meanness was still unbelievable: they had posted guards not only around their fields and gardens to make sure no one took a single fruit from them, but also in the surrounding shrub and wasteland. These men watched to ensure that not a single blade of grass or pebble was picked from the ground. In their orchards, the fruit was numbered on its branches. Not even the birds managed to eat of them. He witnessed a man beating his son so brutally for having eaten one olive too many that he lost an eye. They dug out secret wells in which to hide away their wealth. Rather than spend of their hidden treasures they preferred to lend money, and if they were unable to pay the interest on the loan they would sell themselves into slavery. Never would a man betray his secret hiding place, not even on the verge of death. He would rather take his secret to the grave. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ spent long hours trying to explain to them how much better it was to enjoy the fruits of one's honest work rather than hoarding a useless treasure in a hole in the ground, but they were not willing to listen to him; it was an old custom, they said and it took

the place of a religious observance. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ lived among them for a year-and-a-half and suffered their mistreatment, but in the end he had to flee from them in order to save his life. It was the sixth spring since he had left Shām.

Now he turned inland and left the verdant coastline. He advanced towards the arid deserts and the further he withdrew from the rich and lush country, the gladder his heart became. He sheltered in a cave and remained there in meditation for some time, training his mind away from the evil impressions he had received. After a while, it all seemed to him as a bad dream. He thought of his family and the friends he had left behind in Shām, and he missed them bitterly. Had he only had some news of them! But no revelation concerning them came to him. Most of all he feared that they might have forsaken the faith he had instilled in their hearts.

From there he was ordered to go on to the East and eventually he reached the heights overlooking the River Euphrates. The hills were rough and stony and though there was no wind, the air was not clear. It was as if full of soot. There were footmarks on the road and signs of flocks having passed that way, but for days Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ encountered not a living being. He was convinced that there were people living in that area, but all was mysteriously quiet in that region. One day at noon as he sat resting, two naked men appeared unexpectedly from behind a rock, seized him and dragged him down into a hole in the ground. They made him descend a flight of steps hewn into the rock and led him through a maze of corridors until they reached a spacious chamber. There sat an old man, flanked and guarded by armed men. All as naked as on the day they were born. Dhu l-Kifl's captors explained to the assembly how they had found him. "We were on watch and we observed this man in our area for four days. He was lingering in the hills, not continuing on his way, as if he were looking for something. We had the impression that he knew of our existence here, so we apprehended him and have brought him before you to be judged." One of the elders in the assembly spoke and said to their leader, "O our king! I recognize this man by his signs! He

is none other than Bishr, the son of Ayyūb ﷺ, the prophet who destroyed the idols in his time!" The king sent everyone out of the room and remained alone with Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ. He asked him to tell him his story and Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ did so, hiding nothing from the king.

Then the king told him about his tribe. One day long ago they had grown weary of all the senseless wars and violent crimes committed on the face of the earth and had decided to dig themselves a new and better home in its belly. They had dug and hollowed out the insides of the hills with secret tunnels, connecting them to freshwater supplies and a complicated system of air shafts. There were several hundred of them living in underground villages and they lived there peacefully off the proceeds of manufactured goods which they took to the city markets from time to time. So far, they had managed to keep their underground dwelling a complete secret and though people in the region knew of their existence, they believed them to be not human but a kind of demigod, or spirit of the hills.

"They have developed certain rituals concerning us, and we do our best to play along. These hills are holy to them and they come at certain times to perform pilgrim rites. Now I have certain relics that have come to me and on these days I show them to the crowd of worshippers, and they are filled with awe. I have with me the cloak of the prophet Nūḥ ﷺ, the arrows of Idris ﷺ, and I am always trying to add to my collection of holy relics. This is my concern with you, Dhu l-Kifl. You, as the son of Ayyūb ﷺ will surely have something that belonged to your father? Give it to me." Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ replied, "So you believe in the prophets and their mission to mankind?" "What should I believe in?" answered the underground king, "I make use of these things, that is all." Then he took Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ on a tour throughout his subterranean realm, showing them all the amazing caverns they had patiently hewn out of the rock, and though he was impressed, Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ wished only to return to the open air above ground. He said to the king, "It is not right to go to your graves before you have died. Even if it is a risk to your lives, you must seek the Lord's bounties upon

the face of the earth and beneath His open skies. This type of spectral existence does not befit the sons of Ādam. You are as the living dead. What do you worship here, if not the Creator?" "We do worship our creators," answered the king, "we worship the spirits of our ancestors who brought us into life. We revere them and we can do nothing without their permission." This was Dhu l-Kifl's first encounter with a people who worshipped not gods or idols, but human beings as themselves.

He remained a long time with the king, disputing with him his set of beliefs. Then the king again asked Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام for a relic that had belonged to his father Ayyūb عليه السلام. "I have told you my story in full," said Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام, "and you should realise that not a shred of cloth has come to me from my father. He has passed on to me the immaterial blessing of the prophethood." "We shall speak of this again in the morning," said the king and bade him goodnight.

Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام was taken to a room but he could find no sleep, so he took to strolling along the corridors. He made friends with one of the guards and persuaded him to open the lock for him so he could have a look at the starry skies and a breath of open air. When he beheld the familiar stars above, Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام fell down in a prostration of thanks to the Almighty but he made no attempt to flee, for he had given his word, and he did not wish the sentry to be punished for his sake. As he stood gazing at the stars, there was suddenly a violent tremor and the earth shook. An avalanche of stones fell all around him. Sounds of terror and panic were heard below them as the underground structures collapsed, burying all the inhabitants of that subterranean city beneath them. Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام and the sentry scrambled to safety, and after an hour all was calm again. Below them the silence of the grave echoed in the darkness.

Dhu l-Kifl عليه السلام was full of compassion and said to the man, "What will you do now that you have lost your home and all your family?" The man answered, "If you look at me closely in the daylight, you will see that I do not resemble this underground tribe. I am a stranger here and was caught by them one day as they caught you, too. My home lies in the mountains to

the North, about one month's journey away. It is a land covered by snow for eight months of the year, and I wish to return to the country of my birth." Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ wished to know more about this country and the man spoke of his homeland for a long time. He told him it was situated between Lake Van and the Caspian Sea, north of Igdir on the banks of the River Aras. Its name was Jannatabād. Hearing this name for the second time, Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ grew excited for he recognized from the description that it must be the place Ādam ﷺ had passed through on his way from India and which he likened to paradise for its unrivaled beauty. He knew also that it lay close to Mount Jūdī on which the Ark of Nūḥ ﷺ had come to rest and he felt a strong desire to visit these places. He asked the man whether he would accept him as a traveling companion and lead him to his country. The man gladly agreed to take him along. Together they followed the course of the Euphrates upstream for some weeks, until they reached the town of Bitlis. The people there listened to Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ and many of them accepted his call. Later he continued on to Lake Van and travelled all around its shores, saw the great mountain of Ararat, and at last came to the place called Jannatabād. From there he wished to travel into the country that was ruled by women, but he was told that he had come too late; their kingdom had already split up and they had disbanded into various small groups after the death of their last queen.

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ returned once more to Bitlis and settled amongst the Muslims there. He sent messengers to Shām in order to learn what had become of his family and followers. He learned that his predictions had come true. After his departure, the Persians, Assyrians, Hittites and Egyptians had all become entangled in a struggle for power and all the trade of Damascus had ground to a halt. The commander of Shām had long ago sent out scouts in search of Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ to ask him to return, but a prophet never returns to a place he has been driven from. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ sent word to the Muslims there that they should come to Bitlis and join him. It is reported that Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ was ordered by the Lord to return to Shām and there he rejoined his family and continued to live and preach until he died.

According to another narration, while Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ was on his way to Shām, he passed through a place that had been devastated by the plague many years before that time. A certain group of people had fled from their villages then, leaving the dead and the dying behind in order to save their own skins. At a certain place they had encamped and there they were all found dead in the morning, whilst the sick people left behind in their village recovered. There was no one to bury the dead, so their bodies stayed in the place they had passed away, and in time nothing remained of them but their white bones. Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ and his followers had to pass by this place on their way to Shām, and he told the story as he was informed of it by the revealing angel. The people were fearful of this place and the many bleached bones and they asked their prophet, "O prophet of Allah, show us a miracle! Make all those dead bones come back to life and make those people believe in you and accept the message of Allah!" Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ prayed and raised his hands in supplication. As they looked on, the dead bones began to stir by the Will of Allah, and they clothed themselves in flesh and skin and came back to life, just as they had been aforetime, men, women and children. They all believed in Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ and became his followers, but there was a peculiar thing about them: for as long as they lived their bodies exuded a heavy smell. As some people smell strongly of perspiration, these people's bodies smelt strongly of death, even though they were alive and begot children.

There is a verse in the Holy Qur'ān which refers to this incident

"*Hast thou not regarded those who went forth from their habitations in their thousands fearful of death? Allah said to them, 'Die!' Then He gave them life. Truly Allah is bounteous to the people, but most of the people are not thankful.*" [The Cow, 2:243]

Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ continued to live and preach in the city of Shām until he was 75 years of age. He had not been ill a single day of his life. Suddenly his strength left him and he took to his bed, feeling death to be near. His family gathered round him and asked him to pray for his son Abānī to succeed him as

prophet, as his own father Ayyūb ﷺ had prayed over him on his deathbed, but Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ said, "I will pray only for him who can promise that he will never give way to his anger, never stray from the path of guidance and rule with justice." No-one had the courage to give this guarantee, and they realised that none of them could carry the immense burden Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ had borne as prophet. Thus Dhu l-Kifl ﷺ passed away in his 76th year.

There are several traditions concerning his gravesite. Some say it is in Shām, while other authorities maintain it is either in Bitlis or in his birth-place, the village of Besriye. There are a number of other places where he is commemorated as well. But the most probable site of his tomb is in Shām. There is a mosque and a cemetery of his name there today. I myself have seen him in a dream and our Grandshaykh and Shaykh Nazim have confirmed that this is his true resting place. May Allah have Endless Mercy on his pure soul.

38 – SHU'AYB عليه السلام

SHU'AYB WAS THE SON OF MIKIL son of Issachar son of Madyan, and Madyan was of the sons of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. His name means "one whose heart is enflamed with Divine Love". He is also known as the *khāṭibu l-anbiyā'*, the preacher of the prophets because he was blessed with the gift of preaching in a fashion more compelling than any other prophet. Shu'ayb عليه السلام was sent to the people of Madyan and of al-Ayka, and he was the father-in-law of Mūsā عليه السلام. The Holy Qur'ān relates:

"And to Madyan their brother Shu'ayb; he said, 'O my people, serve Allah! You have no other god than He; there has now come to you a clear sign from your Lord. So fill up the measure and the balance and diminish not the goods of the people and do not spread corruption in the land, after it has been set right; that is better for you, if you are believers.

And do not sit in every path, threatening and barring from Allah's way those who believe in Him, desiring to make it crooked. And remember when you were few, and He multiplied you and behold, how was the end of the workers of corruption. And if there is a party of you who believe the Message I have been sent with and a party who believe not, be patient till Allah shall judge between us; He is the best of judges." [The Battlements, 7:85–87]

Shu'ayb عليه السلام lived and preached in Madyan until his people drove him out. He then gathered a group of followers, 500 in number and settled with them in the village of al-Ayka. Most of Shu'ayb's counsel to his people concerned their fraudulent business practices. He exhorted them to use correct weights and measures and not to lie, deceive or cheat. The people of this area were famed for their craftiness and highway robbery.

Shu'ayb عليه السلام posted himself at a mountain-pass between the two towns and addressed all the passers-by. As he stood upon his rock, his staff in his hand and his beard reaching to

his navel, his heart ablaze with Divine Love, people could not help but be impressed by this radiant figure. His words were strong and furious, and many people stopped and listened to him even against their will. Secretly, people would come from Madyan and gather in Shu'ayb's house to worship and to hear his preaching, and Shu'ayb's following grew. But the earth has ears, and soon this secret meeting place became known and Shu'ayb ﷺ and his followers were driven out again. Shu'ayb ﷺ continued to preach at the pass until the Madyanites posted soldiers to prevent people from stopping there and listening to him. The soldiers were both godless and deaf, so they could not hear Shu'ayb's persuasive speech and be swayed by it.

Word of these threats to Shu'ayb's safety reached Milan, the chief of a Muslim tribe friendly to Shu'ayb ﷺ, and he called for the prophet and said to him, "If you wish, we will migrate with you to another land, for I hear that the Madyanites are plotting against you." Shu'ayb ﷺ answered, "If I were to go anywhere it would be to the Ka'ba, but my Lord has commanded me to enter the cities of Madyan and al-Ayka and to preach openly there in spite of the opposition." Milan was worried and said, "What if they harm you?" "Allah Almighty will protect me in the midst of all adversity and I must obey His Command. I am going alone and I fear that I am being sent to them to deliver the last warning before the Wrath of Allah comes upon them. I pray day and night that He may grant me and them more time, for it has been revealed to me that a terrible fate will befall them, if they do not repent and mend their ways. As a shepherd herds his flocks, so a prophet looks over the herd of believers and takes care of them; but a day may come when a prophet is powerless as regards the lot of his nation, as a shepherd may sometimes be helpless in the face of a fire or some other calamity that overcomes his flock, and he stands by and looks on their destruction which he cannot avert. My heart burns for what I see coming upon the people of Madyan, for man is the crown of Allah's creation and it pains me beyond measure to see this perfection go to waste and be destroyed. Do not ask me, Milan, to reveal my vision to you, for this I may not do. It is

too terrible to recollect, and I pray with all my might that it be Allah's Will to spare them and to make me the intercessor for my nation." Milan watched him go down to Madyan and his heart was heavy. "Let us never forget the stories of the prophets of old," he said to his people, "and the warnings they contain for us. For the Wrath of Allah may be unleashed upon us at any time and nothing will save us from it."

Shu'ayb ﷺ entered Madyan just as the chiefs were gathered in conference, plotting to move against the Muslims and drive them from their land. Shu'ayb ﷺ stood up and spoke to them, reminding them of the unity of Allah and of the gratitude they owed Him. "Allah has granted you gifts He has given to no other idol-worshipping people: He has increased the years of your lives beyond the usual number and He has granted you health and wealth in abundance. Honour Him and show your thankfulness by dealing justly with your neighbours and partners in commerce. Do not use false weights when you are measuring and do not exchange truth for falsehood. If you do not mind my admonishment, the chastisement of the Lord will come upon you and woe unto you for there will be no escape!" But the only answer he got was this, in the words of the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Said the Counsel of those of his people who waxed proud,*

'We will surely expel thee, O Shu'ayb, and those who believe with thee, from our city, unless you return to our creed.' He said, 'What, even though we detest it? We should have forged against Allah a lie if we returned into your creed, after Allah delivered us from it. It is not for us to return into it, unless Allah our Lord so will. Our Lord embraces all things in His knowledge. In Allah we have put our trust. Our Lord, give true deliverance between us and our people; Thou art the best of deliverers.' Said the Council of those of his people who disbelieved, 'Now if you follow Shu'ayb, assuredly in that case you will be losers.'" [The Battlements, 7:88–90]

With this answer they seized him and dragged him out of town, warning him not to show his face again if he valued his life at all. Shu'ayb ﷺ travelled throughout the surrounding villages and preached to whomever he encountered. At last, he came to a village of believers and rested there for a while. Again

the believers implored him to leave this hostile land and to lead them out of danger, but Shu'ayb ﷺ was driven by holy fire and he answered them, "Allah Almighty has charged me with this task and I may not turn from it unless it be His Command. As long as there is life, there is hope, and He alone knows when a people is beyond reform. I intend now to descend into the town of al-Ayka, although it is already late in the day." His people tried as they might to dissuade him, for they were fearful for their prophet. He was a stranger to that town and its inhabitants were known for their cruelty and hostility, for which reason they are also called the *aṣḥab ar-rass* in the Holy Qur'ān. But Shu'ayb ﷺ set out trusting in his Lord for protection and the believers prayed throughout that night for a good outcome.

Shu'ayb ﷺ travelled through the night and at first light he reached the town of al-Ayka. The women espied him first and quickly spread the word. "That crazy man from Madyan has arrived again. Come to the market-square, perhaps we'll have some fun." Shu'ayb ﷺ stood atop a platform and with his staff he motioned for silence. "Tell us something new this time," someone cried, "we are tired of hearing the same thing over and over again." Shu'ayb ﷺ spoke, "I have come to tell you what I have told you before, but this time will be the last, for I am sent to warn you of the Wrath of Allah. If you do not repent and mend your stubborn ways, nothing can save you from certain destruction." When he had finished speaking, people were brought up against him and accused him of being a liar and impostor and challenged him:

"*They said, 'Thou art merely one of those that are bewitched; Thou art not but a mortal, like us. Indeed, we think that thou art one of the liars. Then drop down on us lumps from heaven, if thou art one of the truthful.' He said, 'My Lord knows very well what you are doing.'*" [The Poets, 26:185–188]

They insulted him and accused him of stealing their time, then they dragged him down from his place and threw stones at him. All the while Shu'ayb ﷺ was calling on Allah to be his witness. As they were pushing and pulling him out of the gates, one man remarked in astonishment, "This madman is blind,

yet he addresses us as if he were seeing, and he walks his road as if he sees it, never falling or stumbling or bumping into things; yet he has been blind from birth." But Shu'ayb ﷺ was not born blind. He became blind three times during his life: each time he completed another hundred years of age, he was blinded, then the Lord restored his eyesight anew.

Shu'ayb ﷺ roamed the hills by night and received no further revelation. He climbed a mountain and looked sadly towards al-Ayka and muttered to himself, "*Lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bi-llāhi l-'aliyyi l-'aẓīm.* These people have amassed so many riches and so great a fortune by unjust means — robbery, theft and fraud. All their wealth is unlawful. Their hearts have been poisoned by greed and miserliness so that they have no understanding left." Then he turned towards Madyan and saw a number of people in the distance and as they approached, he recognized them as Milan's envoys and showed himself to them. They were out looking for him and when they met, they praised and thanked the Lord, and told him of what had happened after his departure from Madyan. The unbelievers had attacked their villages and robbed them and driven them out into the hills. There they had sought refuge in caves and prayed only to be granted the company of their prophet, for without him they knew not what to begin. Shu'ayb ﷺ went off by himself to meditate on the matter, and when he returned to them he looked very sad. He told them that revelation had come to him, and that they should be patient. It was not yet the time for him to lead them to the Ka'ba. They asked him the reason for his sorrow, and in answer he pointed in the direction of al-Ayka and said, "The Wrath of Allah is descending." Then he gathered the believers around him and led them in prayer.

Meanwhile in al-Ayka the chastisement of Allah began. People had asked for fire to be sent down upon them from the skies, and the Lord hears and sees. Suddenly something happened to them, so that they felt a great pain within their hearts and a burning as if fire had been dropped onto them. In their houses, on their fields, everyone was affected and they began to rn around madly, not knowing how to escape. They crowd-

ed into the city, believing it to be cooler there, but the heat within them and around them steadily grew and they found no relief. Strangely, it was only the people who were affected. None of the animals or flocks suffered. At last, they perceived a cloud in the sky, and they thought, "This cloud will surely bring us relief from this intolerable heat," for a cloud in the desert is usually a good sign of rain, or at least a shade from the fiercely burning sun. People jumped about as if deranged on account of the extreme heat and they tried to hide themselves in wells and ditches which they dug in hope of finding shelter. However, the earth itself had heated up and their wells were as furnaces and they burnt to death in them. Their last hope was the cloud overhead. They all ran to gather beneath it to find cooling shade. Finally nobody remained outside its shadow and whoever stretched out his hand beyond it quickly withdrew it, for it seemed that everything was ablaze outside the shelter of that giant cloud. There they lay and relaxed for a while, expecting a refreshing rain to fall upon them. Some fell asleep, others began to sing songs in praise of their gods who had saved them, as they believed, from the scorching heat and Shu'ayb's sorcery. Suddenly, the cloud burst. But it was not water that rained upon them, but fire. Fire fell upon them from the sky, and there they perished, each and everyone, charred and blackened. Then the earth itself began to heave and rock, gently at first, then with increasing violence and the charred corpses were flung against the rocks until the bursting earth swallowed them up and all trace of them was lost. Nothing remained but the stench of burnt flesh which lingered in the air. Because of their unbelief and their denial of the true Owner of all the world, He took from them all He had given them and they had no power against Him who is the Giver and Taker of all things. This was the fate of the "Companions of the Thicket," the *aṣḥāb al-ayka*, as it is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*... then there seized them the chastisement of the Day of Shadow; assuredly it was the chastisement of a dreadful day.*" [The Poets, 26:189]

"*Depart to that you cried was lie! Depart to a triple-massing shadow unshading against the blazing flame that shoots sparks like dry faggots,*

sparks like to golden herds. Woe that day unto those who cry it lies!" [The Loosed Ones, 77:29–34]

The Muslims stood and watched this destruction and were struck speechless from horror and awe. Shu'ayb ﷺ said to them, "Let us turn away from this site of damnation, for it is not good to linger where the punishment of Allah has taken place; there is not a soul left alive and nothing left for us to do here." They left and rejoined the encampment of their own people who received their prophet with great joy and relief. They were very moved when they heard of the events and they wept for those who had perished in godlessness. Then they turned towards Madyan. When they had come within sight of the city, they perceived that the earth was trembling and rippling in waves like the sea, while the ground on which they stood remained firm. As they looked on, the city crumbled and fell. There arose a great tumult and shouts of terror were heard as the earth split open and everything was crushed and swallowed. Within the hour all was gone, the earth was flat and quiet once more, and only a huge cloud of dust hung over the place where once the city of Madyan had stood. —

"*So the earthquake seized them and morning found them in their habitation fallen prostrate. Those who cried lies to Shu'ayb, as if never they dwelt there; those who cried lies to Shu'ayb, they were the losers. So he turned his back on them and said, ,O my people, I have delivered to you the Messages of my Lord, and advised you sincerely. How should I grieve for people of unbelievers?*" [The Battlements, 7:91–93]

"*And when Our command came, We delivered Shu'ayb and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us and the evildoers were seized by the Cry, and morning found them in their habitations fallen prostrate as if they had never dwelt there; 'So away with Madyan, even as Thamūd was done away!'*" [Hūd, 11:94–95]

The Muslims stood in silence watching the punishment descend upon Madyan and no one dared speak for a long time afterwards. In the morning, Shu'ayb ﷺ addressed his people and said, "O steadfast believers, the Lord orders us to leave this site of destruction and to pass on to the North. I will lead you through the desert of Tih, past the Lake of Lūt and the Dead

Sea, through the land of Palestine as far as Shām. Make ready quickly, for we must leave this accursed place!" The Muslims were ready to go wherever their prophet would lead them and they set out with no delay. Shu'ayb ﷺ walked on ahead of them but he turned to look back frequently. Why did he look back? Because the Lord had given him vision and he was able to see everything that had happened in the lands they were crossing hundreds of years ago. He perceived these even as if they were in the present and he informed his people of what he saw. He described to them how godlessness had spread among the Egyptians and how they had become an evil people under the new Pharaoh and how the sons of Isrā'īl had adopted their evil ways. He showed them the well into which Yusūf ﷺ had been cast, the Lake of Lūt and the site of the ruined cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He showed them the tombs of Ibrāhīm ﷺ and Isḥāq ﷺ and Ya'qūb ﷺ, and he told them the stories of all these prophets of the past. "Man is created weak," he said, "and he falls into every snare the accursed Shayṭān prepares for him. Again and again the prophets were sent to teach men righteousness and each and every time men returned to do the evil bidding of Shayṭān and their lower inclinations. In this way, they sell their souls for a slight price and lose everything in the bargain."

Shu'ayb ﷺ and his band of followers travelled for years, until they reached Babylon and Ninive. They visited the place where Nimrūd had cast Ibrāhīm ﷺ into the fire and the place where they Ark of Nūḥ had landed. At last, they returned to their old country and found a new people settled there. They told them of all that had come to pass in that place and the believers bore witness. Then he led them on towards the south, past the cities of Sāliḥ ﷺ and Hūd ﷺ and the gardens of Iram and finally they crossed the great and stony deserts and came to the Ka'ba which had forever been Shu'ayb's greatest longing. They drank from the water of the well Zamzam and prayed with grateful hearts to the Lord who had led them to His sanctuary. Shu'ayb ﷺ stayed and settled there and preached to the tribes of that region who had forgotten what the prophets of old had taught

them and remembered not even the holiness of the place they lived in. They had in time begun to believe in all sorts of odd superstitions. They believed that man was descended from giant apes that had come out of Asia, great white apes, three times as tall as men, and they revered them as their ancestors. Shu'ayb ﷺ preached to them and taught them about Allah's creation, and the honour bestowed upon mankind to be His representative on earth, and that this is his highest destiny: to become worthy of this station. Shu'ayb ﷺ was now very old but his voice was powerful and people came from far and wide to hear his words and many believed.

Shu'ayb ﷺ had nearly completed his 300th year when he felt the approach of death. He lay down and a few days later he surrendered his soul. The Muslims buried him in the vicinity of the Ka'ba, between the *maqām* Ibrāhīm and the *rukn*. May Allah's Mercy be upon his soul forever.

Amīn.

39 — MŪSĀ عليه السلام —
PHARAOH COMES TO EGYPT

HERE WAS A YOUNG MAN named Walīd in Palestine, the son of a blacksmith. He had a friend called Hāmān. They were both headstrong and wilful young men. One day Walīd quarreled with his father and was thrown him out of the house. Walīd and his friend Hāmān took to the road and they led the life of brigands and adventurers, roaming the countryside and living from day to day. At last they came to Egypt. There they rented a field near to the gates of Cairo and stayed there for a year, planting water-melon. That year the harvest was good and their fruit was delicious. They bought animals and carts to transport the melons into the markets of the city but the guards at the city-gates stood in their way and exacted the tax for the king. Walīd grew angry and began to argue with them. The more he argued the more the guards raised the tax and in the end he had to give in. So he paid the tax and entered the city with his melons. He and his friend went in to see the king and to complain of the high tax they had been made to pay. The king said to them, "If you were in my place you would do the same. And if a person argued with you, you would only increase the tax. If you own land, you can do the same." Walīd said, "Yes, maybe you are right. But if I were to exact such dues, who would pay me? Give me a written authorization and the case is settled." The king gave him written permission to levy whatever tax he wished on his land and to sell at whatever price he could obtain. Walīd winked at his friend and said to him, "Now our fortunes are made."

After that year's melon harvest was sold, Walīd built a strong wall around his field and set up a number of gravestones to make the place appear to be cemetery. He made it known publicly that this lot was to be the new graveyard, and people

brought their dead to be buried there. At first Walīd charged them only a small fee. But one day the king's daughter died and was brought there for burial and Walīd asked a very high price for the gravesite. They began to bargain with him and the price doubled. The more they argued, the higher the price rose. Finally they brought him before the king and Walīd showed him the writ he had received from his own hand, entitling him to charge whatever price he would. "Take it or leave it," he said to the king, and the king paid what he asked.

In time, Walīd earned so much money off the profitable business of burying the dead that he built himself a regular palace and housed all his friends and associates in separate mansions and luxurious villas. He grew so rich that his lifestyle surpassed that of the king himself and he assumed the appearance of a lord. He still buried the poor without charge, but from the wealthy he would demand exorbitant fees. The notables of the city began to complain of his excessive prices and at last the king summoned him to call him to account for his practices. Walīd entered the audience hall in more regal attire than the king himself. He was a handsome young man and so he made a good impression. He also had the gift of words and knew how to twist and turn his phrases, so that he always seemed to be in agreement with anything the king said to him, yet he got his own way. He was a born diplomat and a politician by nature. The king was no complete fool and he soon recognized these qualities in the man who stood before him. He said to him, "Is it not a shame that a man of your talents should waste his time dealing with what no longer can be changed, for the dead have no more say in the affairs of the kingdom. I invite you to become my vizier and advisor at court, if you will accept the position." Walid gladly accepted and so he became the advisor to the king of Egypt.

For a while, all went well. His advice was good, the king was pleased and the affairs of the court and government prospered. But Walīd had secret ambitions which he discussed with no one but his trusted friend Hāmān. One day, in order to win the favour of the people, he decided to hand back to the people all

the money he had made from his undertaker's business, and he offered to pay all that year's taxes for them. People rejoiced and were full of praise for this generous official. When the king's Grandvizier died, Walīd took his place and his influence grew. One day, the king asked Walīd, "How do I stand in public opinion, I wonder?" "I will find out for you," answered Walīd. He went out in disguise and listened to people's talk in the market-places but he knew very well what he would say to the king. "The people say, 'Our king is a good and just ruler and we are satisfied with him, but he is not as generous as he used to be. Formerly he would invite us once a year to attend a great banquet at the palace. Now he has grown rich and miserly and we love him not as we used to.'" The king decided at once to remedy the situation and gave orders to prepare a great feast to which all were invited. He charged Walīd with the organization of this event and public notices were posted all over the city. The preparations continued and secretly Walīd had all the food poisoned. Then he spread the rumour among the townspeople that the king had treacherous designs in inviting them all to the palace: he intended to poison all their chiefs and notables in order to usurp their belongings and enrich himself at their cost. People took this warning seriously and they all came hiding a knife or dagger beneath their robes. The food was served, and the guests were invited to eat, but no one would touch the food. They said to the king, "We are suspicious of you. We will only eat after you have tasted, the food first." The food was then given to the slaves and dogs to sample and at the first mouthful of food they tasted, they all fell writhing on the ground and died seconds later. People saw their suspicions confirmed and fell upon the king and slew him. Then they turned in gratitude towards Walīd and said, "Had it not been for your warning, we would all be lying here dead and poisoned now. You have saved us, you must become our king."

So, the treacherous Walīd became king and Pharaoh of Egypt. He took as his vizier his close friend Hāmān, and for a while they governed the land justly and with success. They lowered the taxes and gave bread to the poor, and lived themselves

in ease and splendour. After some time Hāmān suggested to his friend, "Your rule is going well, your hand is blessed with success. Why do you not make them believe that you are their god? Then your power over them will be absolute." Thereafter, Pharaoh came to be regarded as divine in the land of Egypt.

Centuries passed. Walīd lived for a very long time, for 450 years and the story of his origin and ascent to the throne were forgotten. No one lived who remembered the truth of the events, and whoever did was quickly silenced. There was no one to dispute Pharaoh's divinity. The cult spread throughout Egypt and became the state religion. The Children of Isrā'īl had been living in Egypt for many years, since the time of Yūsuf ﷺ. The friendly reception they had received from the former Pharaoh had gradually cooled, as they kept to themselves and did not mingle with the Egyptians or join in their cult of Pharaoh. They were oppressed and humiliated, were made to do slave-labour and were treated as the lowest of the low. One night Pharaoh saw a dream: Among the Banī Isrā'īl there grew a tree, and it grew to a great height. He saw many people holding on to its branches. Suddenly all the people holding the branches fell upon Pharaoh and his palace and destroyed it utterly. Pharaoh was worried by this vision and called his soothsayers to interpret it to him. His wise men said, "It is clear. A man will be born to the Banī Isrā'īl who will wrest the power from your hands." But they could not tell him when this event would take place.

Pharaoh then gave orders for all the male children born to the Banī Isrā'īl to be put to death that year. But the midwives hid the births of babies, saying, "The women of the Israelites are not like Egyptian women, they are strong and are their offspring is delivered before the midwife comes to them." But the Egyptian soldiers killed any male children they could find. After a few years, they grew worried that they would run out of slaves if they killed all the male offspring, and so the slaughter of infants was relegated to alternating years.

40 — THE BIRTH OF MŪSĀ عليه السلام

"And mention in the Book Mūsā; he was devoted, and he was a Messenger, a Prophet." [Maryam, 19:51]

"Now Pharaoh had exalted himself in the land and had divided its inhabitants into sects, abasing one party of them, slaughtering their sons, and sparing their women; for he was of the workers of corruption." [The Story, 28:4]

Mūsā's father was 'Imrān of the house of Levi, and his mother was Yohabith, descended also from Ya'qūb's son Levi. His elder brother was Hārūn and he had a sister named Maryam. The name Mūsā is derived from two words, *mu* meaning water, and *sa* meaning wood, which indicates that he came out of the water in a box of wood. The year Mūsā عليه السلام was born was a year of terror for the mothers of Isrā'īl, for the soldiers were again making their rounds, killing the sons of Isrā'īl. At his birth, Mūsā radiated such light that even his own mother could hardly look him in the face. When the soldiers knocked at the door she swaddled the child and hid it in a corner of the house. She told the soldiers that she had been mistaken, she had not been pregnant after all, and her illness had passed. But the soldiers did not believe her and demanded entrance to search the house. In her despair, his mother threw Mūsā into the burning stove and closed the lid. Then she let them in. The soldiers searched the house and found nothing. They believed her then and left. When they had gone, Mūsā's mother said to her daughter Maryam, "Go and bring out your baby brother's body from the fire. He must have burnt to ashes by now." The girl looked in the oven and found the child unharmed, bathed in sweat but hale and whole. They praised the Lord and hid the child in the house for a whole year, and this was easy for them for the child never cried. After his mother had nursed him for a whole year, Mūsā began to raise his voice and the household grew afraid that the neighbours might betray them. His mother did not know what to do and prayed to the Lord for help. One day she heard a voice calling to her from the Unseen — and

this is one example of Divine Inspiration being sent to a woman — "Do not fear," she was told, "have a box made and place the child within it, then throw it into the River Nile. Your Lord will look after the rest."

Mūsā's mother obeyed the voice and went to a carpenter who would make for her such a box as she described to him. "What are you planning to do with such a box?" he asked her, but she gave him no answer. The carpenter guessed the truth of the matter and he followed her to find out for certain. There was a high reward for informers and severe punishment for any family that attempted to hide their sons. The child, his mother, and the whole household were put to death, and their house razed to the ground. The carpenter knew this but he thought only of his reward. When he knew for sure that his suspicion was correct he went to the officer on duty to inform. But when he tried to speak, his tongue twisted in his mouth and no sound came from his lips. He tried to make signs with his hands, but his muscles refused to obey him, and he appeared to be a madman and a paralytic, the spittle dribbling from his open mouth. "Who is this man?" asked the Egyptian officer, and had him thrown out.

Once outside he was well again and lusting for the money paid to informers. So he went back in. But inside the police station, his strange condition returned and he could form no words. The soldiers threw him out once more, and regaining his health, he tried yet another time but could utter no sound. By now the police were convinced he was a madman and they gave him a sound beating before they threw him out into the street and warned him not to come again. Now his reason returned and the carpenter understood that this child must be a special child, that he could be none other than the boy to whom the prophecy pertained. He repented of his evil designs and made the box for Mūsā ﷺ to be laid in and took it to his mother, revealing his knowledge to her. They placed the child in the box and at night took it down to the Nile and watched it float away.

Even though Mūsā's ﷺ mother knew she was acting with divine guidance she still felt a mother's pain at throwing her

own child into the river and she lamented for him. She wept and cried until she was again addressed by the voice from the Unseen, "Fear nothing! We will protect him and he will be returned to your breast!" Mūsā's ﷺ mother took heart and was patient. Now a branch of the River Nile was channelled off and flowed through the palace gardens, later to rejoin the mainstream. That day Pharaoh and his wife Asiya were strolling in the gardens. Suddenly they noticed something bobbing up and down in the waters and Asiya said to her attendants, "Go and see what it is; if it is a living being, it shall be mine, if it is anything else, perhaps a precious treasure it shall be yours." The slave-girls ran and fetched the box out of the water, and tried to open, but try as they might, they could find no way to pry it open.

Pharaoh had a daughter from another marriage and she bore a blemish on her body for which no doctor could find a remedy. But the astrologers had predicted that on a particular day a creature will appear from the waters of the Nile, emerging from between two boards of wood. If the spittle of this creature was applied to her diseased skin, the illness would pass away; there was no remedy but this. Now gradually the whole court had assembled around the box, and no-one was able to open it. Pharaoh's wife Asiya came and said, "Let me try to open it, perhaps I will succeed." She stretched out her hand and the box opened all by itself. As soon as she beheld the child in the box, Asiya's heart was filled with love and Mūsā ﷺ looked up at her smiling. Light issued from his regard and he was sucking on the fingers of his right hand. Asiya lifted the child upon her lap and saw that from each of his fingers flowed a different substance. From one finger came milk, from another butter, from a third honey, from the fourth water and from the fifth cream. When she withdrew his hand from his mouth Mūsā ﷺ began to cry. She tried to comfort him but had no success. All the women held him in turn, but he continued to cry. Even Pharaoh himself held him in his arm, for he liked the child instantly in spite of himself, though he secretly feared it might be the child his astrologers had predicted would destroy

him. Pharaoh's daughter also took the crying baby in her arms, and when some of his saliva dribbled onto her arm, her skin became cleansed and healthy in that spot. She began to collect his spittle and rubbed it on her whole face and body, and she was healed in an instant of the disease that had plagued her whole life. Asiya then said to her husband, "Look at this miracle, this child is not the one predicted in your dream, but rather the one the astrologers foretold to me would occasion my healing. And see what has happened: I have become clean, no trace remains of my disease." Asiya then said to her husband, "O my lord, we have no male children. Let us raise him as our son." Pharaoh answered her, "Take him then as your son." Had he only said, "Let us take him as our own son," he too would have become a believer and a follower of the prophet Mūsā ﷺ, but it was the Will of the Almighty that this was not to be, and it was destined from pre-eternity.

So Asiya kept the child, but he would never stop crying, and they knew not what to do about this. It was as if Mūsā ﷺ were making up for the whole year that he had never once cried. They offered him every sort of food. They brought wet-nurses from all over but he would accept neither food nor suckle. Not far away, Mūsā's mother heard that Pharaoh's people had found something in the river that had caused a stir in the palace and she wondered whether it might be her baby son. Again she was addressed from the Unseen, "Be patient a little while longer, We will give him back to you very soon." She sent her daughter Maryam to find out what was happening and she learnt that they had found a child that would not stop crying and that even Pharaoh was occupied with trying to quiet him. This child would accept no wet-nurse and no food. Maryam's heart leapt and she said, "I happen to know a woman who had nursed the children of many noble families, and no child has ever rejected her milk. If you wish, I will lead her to you." They said, "What are you waiting for, this child is more than we can handle." Maryam ran to fetch her mother and she took him to her breast. He drank and feel asleep on her lap. Again murmurs were heard in the palace that she must be the child's own

mother and that he was indeed the child foretold to be Pharaoh's undoing, as the woman was plainly of the Banī Isrā'īl. Asiya objected and said, "No, it is only that this woman has a great deal of experience with infants and her milk is clean and healthy; that is why he will take her breast and not that of any Egyptian wet-nurse." So she housed her in the palace and gave her her own apartments and attendants, and her only office was to nurse her baby son. The story is also told in the Qur'ān:

"*So then the folk of Pharaoh picked him out to be an enemy and a sorrow to them; certainly Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts, were of the sinners.*

Said Pharaoh's wife, 'He will be a comfort to me and thee. Slay him not; perchance he will profit us or we will take him for a son.' And they were not aware. On the morrow the heart of Mūsā's mother became empty, and she well-nigh disclosed him had We not strengthened her heart, that she might be among the believers; and she said to his sister, 'Follow him,' and she perceived him from afar, even while they were not aware.

Now we had forbidden him aforetime to he suckled by any foster-mother; therefore she said, 'Shall I direct you to the people of a household who will take charge of him for you and look after him?' So We returned him to his mother, that she might be comforted and not sorrowful and that she might know that the promise of Allah is true, but most of them do not know." [The Story, 28:8–13]

41 — MŪSĀ'S ﷺ CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

TIME PASSED. Mūsā ﷺ grew to be a strong little boy and Pharaoh grew very fond of him. He used to place him beside himself on the throne and sought to have him near him all the time. One day when Pharaoh was holding court and was expounding on his own divinity, the child Mūsā ﷺ got up and overturned the whole throne, so that Pharaoh's crown flew to one side, his sceptre to another and Pharaoh himself lay sprawling on the floor. The guards would have seized the child and put him to death instantly, and Pharaoh had strong premonitions of the truth, but again the queen Asiya came running to his

defense, saying, "He is but a child, and he knows not what he does. His extraordinary strength honours us who have raised him, but how can you assume that he acted with intention? Let us test him: Bring two plates and set them before him and let him choose. In the one we will place a red rose, in the other a piece of red glowing coal. Then let him pick. If he chooses the rose, we will know that he has understanding and can be held responsible, but if he chooses the fire, then he is just a child and does not understand what is harmful and what is not." To this Pharaoh agreed and they did as she suggested. The plates were set before him, and Mūsā ﷺ was about to reach for the rose, when the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ staid his hand and made him pick up the burning ember. He picked up the red-hot coal and placed it in his mouth, and both his hand and mouth were badly burned. That is how Mūsā's ﷺ tongue became gashed and twisted. "You see," said Asiya to Pharaoh, "he knows not what he is doing, and he had no bad intention when he playfully overturned your throne." So Mūsā's life was spared once more by Asiya's intervention.

Mūsā ﷺ grew up at Pharaoh's court and stayed there until he was 30 years old. His mother had revealed her identity to him and he knew his brothers and sisters, but he kept this knowledge to himself. It is also related by some that he was married and had two children.

One day when he was out in the streets of the city, Mūsā ﷺ witnessed a scene between an Egyptian and one of his own people. The Egyptian was forcing the man to do heavy, unpaid labour for him while the man begged him to let him go and earn a livelihood for his many children. But the Egyptian showed no mercy and dragged him along by force. Mūsā ﷺ was moved by this injustice and also by sentiments of kinship. He stepped up to the Egyptian and pushed him lightly against the chest. At least he thought he had pushed him only slightly, but his strength was such that his whole hand went into the man's body and he fell down mortally injured and died soon after. There were no witnesses to the deed, the other man fled in fear, for the Egyptian was a man of rank. They searched for

his murderer but could not find him. Mūsā ﷺ kept silent, but he regretted his deed though he had not committed it wilfully; he hadn't been aware of his own strength. The next day he was out in the streets again and he came upon the man whom he had helped the day before. This time he was acting the bully. He was dragging a poor man off to work in spite of his protestations. Mūsā ﷺ stepped up to them, and the man recognized him and cried, "Ah, it is you! Have you come to kill me today as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?" He let go of his victim and ran off to get the soldiers to arrest Mūsā ﷺ. Mūsā ﷺ feared Pharaoh and did not know what to do. The carpenter who had built the box Mūsā ﷺ had been placed in when a baby was still alive and waiting only for the day when Mūsā ﷺ would reveal himself as a prophet of Israel. He now came running to Mūsā ﷺ to warn him and advised him to leave the city immediately. This is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Then came a man from the furthest part of the city, running; he said, 'Mūsā, the Council are conspiring to slay thee. Depart; I am one of thy sincere advisers.'*" [The Story, 28:20]

Mūsā ﷺ departed and set out for Madyan. He did not know the way, and would have lost his way in the desert, but Allah sent two angels to guide him. They appeared to him as men, one went ahead of him, the other behind. The angel in front, Jibrā'īl ﷺ, shortened the road ahead of him, while Mīkhā'īl rolled up the road behind them. In this way they travelled a month's distance in only a day and a night.

42 — MŪSĀ ﷺ IN MADYAN

THEY REACHED a well in the land of Madyan and the angels left Mūsā ﷺ there to rest beneath a tree. He was very tired, and as he lay resting he saw a group of shepherds driving their sheep to water at the well. He watched them draw water in buckets. Then he noticed two young girls, patiently waiting their turn, shy to mingle among the men at the well. He asked them why they had waited so long while their sheep were bleat-

ing with thirst. Had they no brothers to do this job for them? They replied, "We have only our aged father and he does not see well, so we take the sheep to pasture." Mūsā ﷺ then watered their sheep for them after the other shepherds had gone, or according to another account, he lifted a stone from a second well which fifty men could not have lifted and he watered their sheep for them. The girls were surprised and happy, for in those days it was not the custom to be considerate of other people, let alone help women with their work. They ran home to tell their father. They were the daughters of Shu'ayb ﷺ the prophet. Seeing them home earlier than usual he asked them, "Did you not water the sheep today? You have returned home early." His daughters answered him, "O father, we met a stranger at the well today, and he helped us water the sheep. Were you not looking to employ a shepherd? We think he may be the man for you, for he rose to help us even though he was tired and resting from his long journey."

"*Said one of the two women, 'Father hire him, surely the best man you can hire is the one strong and trusty.'*" [The Story, 28:26]

Shu'ayb ﷺ sent one of the girls to invite the man to the house. She approached Mūsā ﷺ modestly and said, "Our father bids you come to the house and he will pay you for drawing water for us." Mūsā ﷺ got up to go with the girl. At that moment Shayṭān, the ever-present, thought to himself, "This is my chance; if I can't tempt him now, I never will. So as the girl walked on ahead of Mūsā ﷺ, a sudden wind sprang up and lifted her skirts. Mūsā ﷺ lowered his gaze and said to her, "Girl, it is better you walk behind me. "But how will you know which way to go?" "Throw a stone ahead of me at every turn-off and I will know which direction to take," answered Mūsā ﷺ.

When they reached the house, Shu'ayb ﷺ greeted him and invited him for a meal in recompense for his service. Mūsā ﷺ replied "I am a descendant of Ibrāhīm the prophet ﷺ. and I accept no wages for my work." Shu'ayb ﷺ answered him, "I too am of the descendants of Ibrāhīm ﷺ, therefore I do not sit down to a meal before I have found a guest to share it with me." So they agreed on the laws of hospitality and sat down together

to eat. Mūsā ﷺ told Shu'ayb ﷺ his story, and Shu'ayb ﷺ set his mind at rest, saying that Madyan was beyond Pharaoh's realm and that he was safe from him there. Then he went and spoke to his daughters about their guest. One of them said, "Father, I know he is a very strong and also a very good man. For at the well he lifted a stone which fifty men could not have lifted. As for his good character, when I was walking ahead of him on the way home, the wind blew and tugged at my skirts. Then he asked me to walk behind him and indicate the way by throwing a stone, in order not to gaze at what is forbidden. Shu'ayb ﷺ then returned to his guest and said to him, "I wish to marry you to one of my daughters, provided you will herd my sheep for eight years. Mūsā ﷺ replied, "I will take the one who fetched me from the well, for she spoke well of me." That is why we say: if someone has done good by you, repay him in kind, and if you are not able to do that, at the very least speak well of him, for that is also a form of *ṣadaqa*.

43 — THE STAFF OF MŪSĀ ﷺ

AFTER THEY HAD AGREED on the conditions, Shu'ayb ﷺ sent his other daughter into the next room where he kept his collection of staffs to fetch a suitable stick for Mūsā ﷺ to herd the sheep with. Shu'ayb ﷺ examined the stick she brought, feeling it with his hand, for his eyes no longer saw well and he sent her back, saying, "No, this is not the right stick. Fetch another." She came with another one, but her father said, "No, this is the same one, get another." So she brought one stick after the other, but her father insisted it was still the same one and piled them all to one side. At last, since there was no stick that seemed different to him, he gave him one of the sticks and said, "This one will do for you." Mūsā ﷺ took his shepherd's staff and left. As soon as he had departed Shu'ayb ﷺ realised that he had given him the one staff which meant most to him, and he fell into a state of great anxiety and concern about it. "This staff was given to me as a trust; it is none other than the staff our

father Ādam brought with him from Paradise and it has passed from the hand of one prophet to the next, down through the ages. I was charged to give it to no one but the prophet who is to appear and who will be called Kalīmullah, the Word of God and who will work great miracles with it. I must recover this precious trust and give him a different stick." Shu'ayb ﷺ went after Mūsā ﷺ and said, "Give me back this staff. I made a mistake, it is not meant for you but for another man." But Mūsā ﷺ liked the stick and had a mind to keeping it. They would have argued about it, but just then a person approached and it occurred to them to ask for his arbitration. According to one tradition, the man told them to throw the stick to the ground and then to try to lift it up. They each wondered, for the stick was no heavier than a normal shepherd's staff. First Shu'ayb ﷺ bent to pick up the stick, but he found he could not lift it an inch off the ground. Mūsā ﷺ then tried and he raised the staff over his head with no difficulty. The arbitrator decided that Mūsā ﷺ must be its rightful owner. Then he revealed himself to the two men; he was no man but an angel sent by the Lord of the Worlds, and he set Shu'ayb's heart at peace saying, "O Shu'ayb, you may now rest, for you have completed your task. The staff has come to its owner, and you are relieved of that trust. Before you stands he who is known as Kalīmullah in the Divine Presence. So give thanks and praise the Almighty." Shu'ayb ﷺ was overjoyed at this news, for he felt the closeness of Allah. His heart was always burning with longing for His Holy Presence and this flame that was burning in Shu'ayb's heart had attracted Mūsā ﷺ to him. Mūsā ﷺ's rank is higher than Shu'ayb's ﷺ, for he was a prophet as well as a Messenger, while Shu'ayb ﷺ was only a prophet. The Lord spoke to Mūsā ﷺ without an intermediary, and gave him the Law of the Torah.

Mūsā ﷺ went off to pasture Shu'ayb's sheep. Shu'ayb ﷺ called after him, "O Mūsā, do not lead my sheep towards the green fields, take them into the dry plains where everyone else grazes their sheep. In that luscious green valley dwells a terrible dragon who attacks and devours everything that comes near

him. He spits poison and breathes fire and he will destroy you and my flocks." Mūsā ﷺ heard and obeyed, but as he went along he found he could not control his sheep; they strayed towards that perilous valley and nothing he did could stop them. All he could do was to follow. As he sat watching them graze, a heavy sleep came over him which he could not resist. He drifted off into slumber, his staff by his side. After a while he awoke and looked for his sheep. They had grazed to their heart's content and their bellies were full and bloated like the bellies of ships. Mūsā ﷺ rose and reached for his staff, and to his surprise he found it covered with dried blood. He looked about for the trace of a fight and found pieces of the slain dragon scattered about the field. By the wisdom of the Almighty, Mūsā ﷺ's staff had turned into a fierce rival dragon which had fought and killed the dreaded dragon of that valley. Mūsā ﷺ cleaned the staff and led his sheep homewards. He told Shu'ayb ﷺ what had happened and they both gave praise and thanks to the Lord, and Shu'ayb ﷺ said, "O Mūsā, it is indeed your very own staff; you must guard it well, for you are yet to see great miracles from it."

44 — MŪSĀ ﷺ IS CALLED TO PROPHETHOOD AND SENT TO PHARAOH

MŪSĀ ﷺ HERDED Shu'ayb's ﷺ sheep for eight years, before he was married to his daughter, Zipporah. He said to his father-in-law, "The agreed term is accomplished. With your leave I shall depart." Shu'ayb ﷺ said, "Abide until the end of the year. Then you may go. All the lambs that are born female this year shall be yours." That year there were only female lambs and so Mūsā's ﷺ flock doubled in number. In the new year Mūsā ﷺ again asked permission to leave, but his wife had just given birth to a son and was unfit to travel. So Shu'ayb ﷺ's entreated him to stay another year that the ten years might be full and he promised him all the speckled lambs that were born that year. Now, that year all the ewes gave twin births and all the lambs

were speckled. In this way Mūsā ﷺ's flock grew very large and so the ten years were completed. Mūsā's ﷺ wife was heavy with her second child and her time was near. Mūsā ﷺ took leave of his father-in-law and took the road towards Egypt for he wished to see again his mother and family, whom he had left behind when he fled from Pharaoh. Suddenly, the sky darkened and a great storm wind arose, blowing sand and rain and hail, so that they could not keep up their intended course and soon lost their way in the desert. For several days they battled the storm and could find no shelter. They could light no fire, nor erect a tent on account of the high winds, and Mūsā's ﷺ wife, Zipporah, went into labour. Their situation was growing desperate. Suddenly, Mūsā ﷺ beheld a faint glow in the distance and he said to his family, "I see in the distance what appears to be a fire;

"Perhaps I shall bring you news of it or a faggot from the fire, that haply you shall warm yourselves." [The Story, 28:29]

"Perhaps I shall bring you a brand from it or I shall find at the fire guidance." [Ṭā Hā, 20:10]

Mūsā ﷺ set out in the direction of the fire and, as he came close to it, he made out a bush which was enclosed in a shroud of light which resembled fire yet the tree was not consumed by the burning.

"When he came to it, a voice cried, 'Mūsā, I am thy Lord; put off thy shoes; thou art in the holy valley Ṭuwā.'" [Ṭā Hā, 20:11–12]

As soon as Mūsā ﷺ had left his group, the storm died down and all was calm. His men set out to look for him, but they could find no trace of Mūsā ﷺ or the fire, though they were expert in reading tracks. The Lord had veiled him from them. The Lord revealed Himself to Mūsā ﷺ and for three days and nights he was engaged in communion with Him. Mūsā ﷺ nearly succumbed to the awe and fear His Holy Presence engendered in him, and he trembled and shook and was striken by dumb terror. In order to allay his fear, the Lord distracted his attention and asked.

" 'What is that, O Mūsā, thou hast in thy right hand?' 'Why, it is my staff', said Mūsā, 'I lean upon it, and with it beat down leaves to feed my sheep; other uses also I find in it.'

Said He, 'Cast it down, O Mūsā.' And he cast it down and behold it was a serpent sliding.

Said He, 'Take it and fear not; We will restore it to its erstwhile' state.'" [Ṭā Hā, 20:17–21]

Thus the Lord called Mūsā ﷺ to be His prophet, and upon his wish He granted prophethood also to his brother Hārūn and sent them both to Pharaoh.

"'Go to Pharaoh for he has waxed insolent; yet speak gently to him, that haply he may be mindful, or perchance fear.'

'O our Lord,' said Mūsā and Hārūn, 'truly we fear he may exceed against us, or wax insolent.'

'Fear not,' said He, 'surely I shall be with you, hearing and seeing.'" [Ṭā Hā, 20:43–46]

Mūsā ﷺ and his brother Hārūn came together and presented themselves at Pharaoh's gates, but they were not admitted. Mūsā ﷺ went again every day for one whole year and his patience was so great that he never once got angry at being refused. After a year, finally they were admitted and came before Pharaoh's throne. He spoke to him as the Lord had commanded him speak:

"'We are the Messengers of thy Lord, so send forth with us the Children of Israel and chastise them not; we have brought thee a sign from thy Lord and Peace be upon him who follows the guidance! It has been revealed to us that chastisement shall light upon him who cries lies and turns his back.'

Pharaoh said, 'Who is your Lord, O Mūsā?'

He said, 'Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation then guided it.'

Pharaoh said, 'And what of the former generations?'

Said Mūsā, 'The knowledge of them is with my Lord, in a Book. My Lord goes not astray, nor forgets. He who appointed the earth to be a cradle for you and therein threaded roads for you and sent down water out of the heaven and therewith we have brought forth diverse kinds of plants. Do you eat and pasture your cattle? Surely in that are signs for men possessing reason.'

Out of the earth We created you and We shall restore you into it and bring you forth from it a second time.So We showed Pharaoh all Our signs, but he cried lies, and refused.

'Hast thou come, O Mūsā,' he said, 'to expel us out of our land by thy sorcery? We shall assuredly bring thee sorcery the like of it; therefore appoint a tryst between us and thee, a place mutually agreeable and we shall not fail it, neither thou.'" [Ṭā Hā, 20:47–58]

They had one great Feast Day in Egypt, and Pharaoh decided that this day should be the day of the contest. He sent out word to all sorcerers and magicians in the land that they should prepare for that day and assemble without fail. Four thousand sorcerers came and presented themselves before Pharaoh. They inquired about Mūsā ﷺ and his magic and were told that Mūsā ﷺ had only a staff which sometimes he would turn into a serpent. Now the magicians knew this to be one of the most elementary tricks of magic: to turn sticks into snakes, and they said to Pharaoh, "It will be an easy task for us, but what will be our reward?" Pharaoh promised them distinguished positions and many benefits that would make it well worth their while. So they accepted the challenge.

On the appointed day, they all assembled, and the leaders of the magicians asked Mūsā ﷺ, "Will you cast your staff first or shall we begin?" Mūsā ﷺ replied, "You may begin." So the magicians began to work their magic, and from their staffs and wands they produced creatures which seemed to be alive and lay writhing and twisting on the ground. The onlookers were startled and held their breath as this tangle advanced towards the prophet Mūsā ﷺ. The monstrous illusion made a hissing sound, steam or smoke seemed to issue from the mouths of those magical dragons. Mūsā ﷺ and his brother were standing alone to one side, and when it came to Mūsā ﷺ to cast his staff he felt afraid. But why did Mūsā ﷺ feel fear? Was it because the magicians had produced a thousand monsters by their magic, and Mūsā ﷺ had only one staff to throw? No, Mūsā ﷺ was not afraid of their sorcery, for he was one of the greatest and most highly honoured prophets, and his fear was not fear of failure or lack of trust in the Lord Almighty. Mūsā ﷺ feared simply that the people would not be able to distinguish between a true miracle and a feat of magic, and he knew not how he should convince them. But Allah sent to him reassurance, and spoke to him:

"*'Fear not: surely thou art the uppermost. Cast down what is in thy right hand and it shall swallow what they have fashioned for they have fashioned only the guile of a sorcerer and the sorcerer prospers not wherever he goes.'*" [Ṭā Hā, 20:68–69]

Just as that tangled knot of horror had drawn very close to him, Mūsā ﷺ cast his staff and it turned into a large dragon which devoured all the smaller ones. The crowd witnessing this frightful event took to their heels and fled. As many as 18,000 people were trampled to death that day in the panic of this stampede. Pharaoh himself turned to flee and he ran towards his palace which was built high and strong. The monster pursued him and opened its terrible mouth so wide that the whole palace rested between its jaws. The whole palace shook and Pharaoh fell off his throne a third time (first in his dream, next when Mūsā ﷺ overturned his throne as a child), and his crown fell off his head. All the days of his long life Pharaoh had never been ill. He had not known headache, toothache or stomach-ache and he used to empty his bowels only once every forty days. On that he based his claims to divinity. But on this day, when Mūsā's ﷺ dragon held the palace between its terrible jaws and threatened to crush it and all its inhabitants with its horrendous strength, on this day Pharaoh rushed to the royal toilet forty times, such was his fear on that day.

Pharaoh screamed, "Catch him. Hold him. Stop him. Somebody do something!" But everyone was as helpless against the monster as Pharaoh himself. At last, Mūsā ﷺ was ordered to recall the dragon, and he stooped and caught hold of its tail. As he did so, it became as it had been before, a simple stick. The magicians alone had not fled for they wished to observe this extraordinary event. They knew that if Mūsā's ﷺ doing had been magic, everything would return to its former shape once the spell was broken. All their sticks would reappear. But when the dragon vanished, they saw only Mūsā's ﷺ staff and none of their own sticks. From this they understood that it had been a true miracle granted to a prophet. All the magicians then believed and fell down in prostration before the God of Mūsā ﷺ and Hārūn.

"Pharaoh said, 'Have you believed him before I gave you leave? Why, he is the chief of you, the same that taught you sorcery, I shall assuredly cut off alternately your hands and feet, then I shall crucify you upon the trunks of palm-trees; you shall know of a certainty which of us is more terrible in chastisement and more abiding.'" [Ṭā Hā, 20:71]

But the magicians were no longer impressed by Pharaoh's might, and they answered, "Whatever you may do to us, it matters not, for we have found true faith in our hearts. Your power reaches no further than this world. All your torment and punishment touches us but briefly. We have found a path leading to eternal peace and a life everlasting. Allah has guided us to the truth and all your power is of no account."

The magicians had asked Mūsā ﷺ whether he or they should cast their staffs first. That was the first sign of their recognition of his greatness and of respect for him. Therefore the Lord gave their hearts such undaunted faith that Pharaoh's threats meant nothing to them and He gave them the strength to bear all his cruelty without fear.

According to one tradition, Mūsā ﷺ had prayed to the Lord to vouchsafe security to the first people in Egypt who believed in him and the Lord granted his prayer. The magicians became part of Mūsā's ﷺ nation and Pharaoh's punishment was averted from them. According to another narration, Pharaoh executed them, and they became the first martyrs of that nation. Allah knows best.

Even after these events, Mūsā ﷺ and Hārūn continued to preach to Pharaoh and they said to him, "O Pharaoh, you have lived on earth now for 400 years and yet you do not believe in Him who created the heavens and the earth. Allah may increase your life and your kingdom for a thousand years, if only you will believe in Him and worship Him truly." Pharaoh came very close to believing, but his pride and his stubbornness were too strong for him to overcome. He consulted with his trusted advisor Hāmān and told him what the prophets had said to him but Hāmān said, "O Walīd, have you lost your mind? You are now a god to your people and your power over them is absolute. Will you then content yourself to become a slave and to

worship another being? What more could you desire than what you already possess?" So Pharaoh remained stiff-necked and unyielding. For a long time Mūsā ﷺ spoke to him gently as the Lord had commanded him, until one day he was ordered to use his stick. For at times men will heed words of reason, but donkeys listen only to the stick. The Lord ordered Mūsā ﷺ to perform miracles that Pharaoh and his people might be warned. He struck the waters of the Nile with his staff and all the water turned to blood, so that the fish died and no one had any water left to drink or to wash. This condition lasted for eight days before it was lifted. Still they would not believe. Next came the plague of locusts followed by the plague of frogs, and then their cattle was striken. After this there came a plaque of hailstorms and famine. Still Pharaoh's heart remained hardened and he persisted in his unbelief, attributing all these plagues to natural causes. Finally, a plague of boils came over the Egyptians and 70,000 died within one week. Then people came to Mūsā ﷺ and pleaded with him, "O Mūsā, please lift this plague from us before it destroys us all, and we will believe and let your people go." But when the plague was lifted from them, they fell back on their promises and Pharaoh increased his oppression of the Banī Isrā'īl, making them responsible for all the disasters.

Mūsā ﷺ spoke to the Lord, "O my Lord, in spite of his unbelief You grant respite to Pharaoh. Explain to me the wisdom in this." The Lord spoke to Mūsā ﷺ, "I have given him a period of grace, for he has many good characteristics for which I love him and I do not hasten to destroy what I have created, O Mūsā ﷺ. Firstly, he rules his people with justice. Secondly, he is a generous man and looks after the poor, and thirdly he has built up a city of great beauty. That he claims to be god in no way diminishes My Majesty. It is not important to Me."

One day, Pharaoh said to Mūsā ﷺ, "We will arrange a decisive contest between us to see whose religion is the true one. Let us both go to the Nile and order it to stop flowing. If it obeys my command, the proof of my claim will be evident." Mūsā ﷺ agreed and they went to a certain place overlooking the river. Mūsā ﷺ prayed his evening and night prayers and went to

sleep. Pharaoh however went to his chamber and suspended himself from the ceiling by his beard and remained all night in that position, engaged in fervent supplication. He cried to the Lord, "O my Lord, I know of Your existence and I know I am less than nothing before You. I pray to You this one time not to abase me before the eyes of my people and Your prophet Mūsā ﷺ. Please grant me this prayer, just this once. Thereafter You may send me to hellfire. Grant me tomorrow's success." He implored the Lord all night long and in the morning the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ appeared to him in the shape of a man. Pharoah, hanging from the ceiling, said, "What do you want?" "I have an urgent problem," answered the man, "which brooks no delay. For many years I have employed a servant in my house and I have always treated him well and honoured him with rank and position. Now, instead of showing me gratitude, I see that he has begun lording it over the other servants in my household, abusing the power I gave to him and acting in my name without authority. What would be your verdict in such a case?" Pharaoh answered, "Have him punished either by burning or by drowning." "If I execute him as you say, it is only just, but people will not believe me and will accuse me of murder; I must have your signature on this document, authorizing the sentence." He extended a paper and a pen towards Pharaoh, and Pharaoh signed the document, sentencing that disobedient servant to death by drowning, little knowing that he had signed his own death sentence. Then the angel disappeared and the Lord granted Pharaoh's prayer on that day.

In time, a lot of Egyptians began to follow the prophet and even at the court of Pharaoh there were believers. The queen, Asiya, was the first of the royal household to believe and she worshipped in secret with her following of slave-girls and servants. Though she was formally married to Pharaoh, Asiya remained a virgin all her life. On the Day of Judgement, she will be raised up and become the wife of our noble Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

One day, one of the servant women who had become a Muslim was combing the princess' hair and she happened to drop

the comb. As she bent to pick it up, she pronounced the words of the *basmala*. The princess heard these words and questioned the woman about them. The woman explained that she began every action in the name of Him who had created the heavens and the earth and every living thing. The princess said, "You mean, in the name of my father, Pharaoh?" "O no," answered the woman, "Allah forbid. How can your father who is a created being have created the world? He is but a mortal as you or I." And they began to argue. In the end the princess reported the woman to Pharaoh and accused her of heresy. Pharaoh had the woman interrogated and threatened to punish her severely if she did not renounce her new faith, but the woman was steadfast and said, "No matter what you may do to me, it will only affect my brief life here on earth, whereas He who created both you and me will give me eternal reward in the life hereafter. I will never prostrate to any but Him, the Almighty ..."

This courageous woman had a husband and five children. Pharaoh had them brought before him and said to the maidservant, "You say your god has hell to punish the wrongdoers on the Last Day. I am god and I have prepared hell for you right now." He ordered a great cauldron to be set on the fire and when the water began to boil he had the woman's husband thrown into it, and he was boiled until the flesh peeled off his bones. Then they threw in her children, one after the other. Yet still the woman refused to give up her faith in the Almighty. Only when they grabbed her last baby from her, an infant of a few months, and she heard the child cry for his mother's breast, she suddenly felt a great pain within and had a moment's hesitation. She thought to herself, "So what if I prostrate before Pharaoh and pretend to have returned to worshipping him. I can still preserve my true faith within my heart. At least I will have saved the youngest of my poor, innocent children from this terrible fate." While she pondered, and Pharaoh was watching her for signs of her weakening, the voice of that baby was suddenly heard loud and clear by all present, and he spoke these words, by the Grace of the Almighty: "O mother, do not worry or grieve for me or for any of us. I see Paradise opening

before me and the Huris are beckoning to me to enter. Have no fear of Pharaoh or his henchmen. They are as nothing before Allah Almighty. *Lā ilāha illā llāh!*" Instantly, Pharaoh had the child thrown into the boiling cauldron and he died at once. Then the woman said, "O Pharaoh, I have served at your court for a long time. Now every condemned prisoner has the right of one last request. My request is that you throw me, too, into that kettle so that I may rejoin my family and that you bury us together in one grave."

Pharaoh granted her this request and it was done. On the night of the *mi'rāj* of our Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, he was guided by the angel towards Jerusalem and suddenly he picked up a most lovely scent. He asked the angel leading him about this smell, and the angel told him that they had just passed over the grave of that comb-girl of Pharaoh's daughter. A garden of Paradise had been prepared for her and her family there and there they rest, enjoying its delights to this very day.

When the queen Asiya, learned of what had been done to her faithful servant-girl, she was very angry and reproached Pharaoh bitterly, "What has that poor woman done to you that you must act so cruelly, and what crime have those innocent children committed?" Pharaoh grew suspicious of his wife and said, "So you, too, share her convictions?" "Yes, I do, " admitted the queen, "I have placed my faith in the Almighty Lord whose reign is everlasting. This passing life is of no value to me, so you may take it." Now Pharaoh loved Asiya and he did not wish to hurt her, but seeing his pride injured before all the assembled court, he had to make a show of his power so as not to lose face. He ordered her to be crucified in a public place under the burning sun of Egypt. She was nailed to a cross and hung there for many days. Pharaoh would come every day and call upon her to relent and to forsake her faith in the invisible god; then he would spare her life. But Asiya gave him no reply. She uttered not a word. Even when Pharaoh ordered her to be whipped she did not sigh. Pharaoh made her eat salty barley bread and gave her no water. The sun burned down upon her fiercely and the flies infested her wounds; she was being eaten

away while yet alive. Still she clung to her faith and her heart remained whole. Pharaoh showed her no mercy and increased her torment.

One day Mūsā ﷺ passed by the place where she hung crucified, and she winked at him and made a sign which he understood to mean, "Look at my condition. Can you do nothing to help me?" Mūsā ﷺ raised his hands to heaven and prayed for her and asked the Lord to show mercy to that woman who was suffering such unspeakable torture for His sake. The Lord heard Mūsā's ﷺ prayer and from that day on, Asiya felt no more pain. Pharaoh sought every day to increase her agony. He had the skin torn off her feet and legs up to her knees, but Asiya felt no more. She began to see the wonders of paradise before her, the Huris advancing towards her with refreshing foods and drinks, greeting her as their queen. The Lord lifted the veil from the hearts of the angels of the seven heavens and they grew aware of the suffering of this patient heart. The angels began to weep for her and their tears drenched the earth as rain. Asiya then uttered the words, "O Lord, build for me a house in Paradise in Your Presence." The angels heard her words and said, "That is no great reward to ask for all these sufferings." The Lord answered them and said, "You must listen closely. She said, 'In Your Presence.' That is the highest reward she can ask for and it is proportionate to what she has suffered." He then ordered the angels to bring her soul to Paradise. Asiya died with a smile on her lips.

Her tormentors watched her die, and as they perceived only the outward aspect they said to the people, "Have you any more doubt that whoever follows this man Mūsā ﷺ must have lost his mind? Only a mad person can die smiling, after being tortured for so long. Let this be a lesson for you all."

45 — THE EXODUS

WITH THE DEATH of his queen Asiya began the last forty years of Pharaoh's reign. He turned into a cruel tyrant in late life. In particular, his oppression was directed towards the Banī Isrā'īl, who believed in the message Mūsā ﷺ brought to them. At last, Mūsā ﷺ received the Divine Command to lead his people out of Egypt and out of slavery. The news spread among the Banī Isrā'īl. Some of them were prepared to follow Mūsā ﷺ from the fullness of their faith, while others wished only to be delivered from Pharaoh's cruel oppression. Forty days had passed since Mūsā ﷺ received the command to lead his people away, but for forty days no one could wake up on time. There was something holding them back in Egypt. Yūsuf had died in this land and his last request had been that the tribes of Isrā'īl should take him with them, if ever they should leave Egypt. Everyone remembered this condition but none knew anymore where Yūsuf's ﷺ body lay. Finally, an Egyptian woman of Asiya's family told them where the grave was; they dug there and found the coffin. This woman wished to accompany the tribes when they left Egypt, as did the carpenter who had built the box for Mūsā's mother.

Now the Command of the Lord came again, and He ordered all the Israelites to slaughter a sacrifice and to paint their doors with blood as a sign, for He intended to smite the Egyptians once more. He sent the Angel of Death to all Egyptian houses that night to kill their first-born. That same night, while the Egyptians cried and cared for their dead — for there was not a house in Egypt that had not been visited by the Angel of Death, save the houses that were marked with the blood of the sacrifice — the Lord ordered the Banī Isrā'īl to leave. So Mūsā ﷺ set out with the tribes by night and they numbered no less than 700,000 souls, including women and children. When Ya'qūb ﷺ had settled aforetime in Egypt with his family, they had been only 70 persons. Now Pharaoh and the Egyptians could not follow them right away as they were occupied with the burial

rites, but the following day he set out with his armies on horseback, with a great clatter of arms. The Banī Isrā'īl had come to the banks of the sea and behind them Pharaoh's armies were gaining on them. They began to lament and complain to their prophet, "Had we only stayed where we were. There we were safe. Now look at us. We are dead men. Before us the waters of the sea and from behind Pharaoh's host!" They blamed Mūsā ﷺ for having brought them into these straits.

Mūsā ﷺ was also perplexed and knew not what to do. Then Yūsha' came up to him and asked him where he had been ordered to lead them. Mūsā ﷺ pointed towards the sea with his staff and Yūsha' spurred his horse and the sea opened for him and he was gone. Next came the carpenter who had believed in Mūsā's mission before anyone else, and he too disappeared in the sea. But the mass of people stood on the shore, wailing loudly, "What shall we do? Ah, we are lost!" Then Jibrā'īl ﷺ appeared to Mūsā ﷺ and ordered him to strike the sea with his staff.

The Banī Isrā'īl were divided into twelve tribes, descended from the twelve sons of Ya'qūb ﷺ. It was their custom that each tribe had their separate well and that they would not drink from each other's water, nor would they travel on a road used by another tribe. When Mūsā ﷺ struck the sea with his staff, it rose up on both sides as a mountain, leaving a dry passage in between, so that the sun touched the seabed. This will not happen again until the Day of Judgment. Twelve separate pathways became visible for each of the tribes of Israel to pass through, and they passed.

Pharaoh beheld this miracle from afar, and he understood well that it was given to Mūsā ﷺ, but he said to his armies, "You see, the sea is rising up from respect of my majesty, and it is splitting a road in its midst so that I might pursue my enemy." But in his heart of hearts he knew very well that it was not so and he was afraid to advance towards the waters. Pharaoh was mounted on a magnificent stallion. Suddenly the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ appeared riding a mare called the 'Horse of Life', and passing close by Pharaoh's stallion he rode ahead into the wa-

ters. Driven by nature, the stallion could not be restrained, he followed her and plunged in after the mare. Seeing their king ride on ahead, the whole army followed him. The angel Mikā'īl ﷺ took the shape of an officer and urged them on. When the whole army was in the trough formed by the walls of the sea, the Lord ordered the sea to close in upon them and the mountains of water came crashing down, and Pharaoh and all his host was drowned.

Some of the Israelites could not believe that Pharaoh was dead for they had heard all their lives that he was immortal and would never die. Mūsā ﷺ prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, look at Your people and at the weakness of their faith. What shall I do with them?" So after three days the Lord made the sea expel the bodies of Pharaoh and his men, and the Israelites could tell from his bloated corpse that indeed he had died and the sea would not accept him back.

Up to the time of our prophet Muḥammad ﷺ the collecting of war spoils and booty was not made lawful. Now some of the Israelites knew how to dive and swim and they fished out of the waters some of the precious ornaments Pharaoh and his army had worn, even though Mūsā ﷺ forbade it to them. They did not like to listen to what displeased them and took some of these things with them. On their way, they passed by certain tribes and noticed that the idols they were worshipping were made of precious materials and they said to Mūsā ﷺ, "Why can we not see the god we are worshipping, O Mūsā ﷺ? Why do we not have such precious statues to adore?" Mūsā ﷺ said to them. "O my people, the Lord of the Worlds has honoured you above all other nations. He has saved you from Pharaoh and all his host and you have witnessed miracle after miracle. Still your hearts are inclined to idolatry. Still you do not understand that there is no god but He, the Living, the Eternal?" Then the Banī Isrā'īl fell silent and continued on their way.

46 – MŪSĀ ﷺ ON MOUNT ṬŪR AND THE GOLDEN CALF

DURING THE YEARS that Pharaoh had ordered all the male infants of Israel to be slaughtered, there were some mothers who had hidden their children in a certain cave. The angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to them and took them under his wing and they suckled on it and in that way were fed. They grew up accustomed to the angel's presence and aware of him. One of these children was the man who came to be known as the "Sāmirī".

One day when the angel came to bring revelation to Mūsā ﷺ, the Sāmirī perceived him, mounted upon his steed which is called the 'Horse of Life'. Nobody noticed when he bent to scoop up a handful of earth from beneath that horse's hooves, for it was not visible to anyone else. The Sāmirī hid this bit of clay from everyone. Now they had come as far as the mountain of Ṭūr in the Sinai and the Lord called Mūsā ﷺ to the top of the mountain to converse with him. When he returned, the people said, "All the previous prophets have come with a scripture. Why do we have none? We do not know what is the right way for us and we want to know!" Mūsā ﷺ returned to the mountain of Ṭūr and asked the Lord for a Book. The Lord answered, "They shall have their Book but let them be warned: if they do not hold to it and live by its laws they shall be struck by such punishment that they will become a lesson and a reminder for all the peoples of the world." Mūsā ﷺ went and warned the tribes of the responsibility they were asking for, but they insisted on their will. Then Mūsā ﷺ was ordered to fast for thirty days and went into seclusion on the mountain of Ṭūr. The people did not count the days of fasting correctly, they counted the nights as well, and when thirty days had passed they had already counted to sixty. "He has not returned when he should have." They said. "He has deceived us and secretly gone away ..." Others said, "Perhaps his prayer is not being answered because we disobeyed him when he ordered us leave behind the jewels and gold we took from the drowned men and which we

carry with us. Let us burn them." They made a great fire and threw all these objects into it, but as they were mostly made of metal, they did not burn but only melted.

At that time the Sāmirī stepped forth. He was a jeweller and a goldsmith. He collected the molten metal and fashioned from it a golden calf. This he sprinkled some of the clay on which the hooves of Jibrā'īl's ﷺ 'Horse of Life' had stood, and the golden calf came to life and walked among people and lowed like a real calf. The Sāmirī said to the people, "This is your god whom Mūsā ﷺ forgot to show you before he left for the mountain ..." Mūsā's brother Hārūn ﷺ had stayed with them, and he tried his best to call people back from worshipping the golden calf. Never at any time have there lived two prophets among one people at the same time. But whatever he said to them could not dissuade them and they began to threaten him. So Hārūn ﷺ withdrew with 12,000 of the faithful and they busied themselves with worship and prayer. As for the followers of the Sāmirī, they gathered around their living idol and he taught them ways of 'worship' which strongly resemble today's New Year's revelry. Their 'worship' consisted of drinking, dancing and carrying on, and it was in every way perverted and idolatrous.

Mūsā ﷺ fasted on the mountain for thirty days and when he was bothered by the foul smell coming from his mouth after so long a fast, the Lord instructed him to use a *miswāk*. "The smell from your mouth during the days of your fast is more pleasing to Me than the perfume of musk," the Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ. Mūsā ﷺ fasted an additional ten days, fasting forty days in all. During those last ten days he could hear the sound of trees being cut in paradise from which the tablets of the Torah were made, and he also could hear the scratching of the Pen of Destiny as it wrote upon them. Great indeed, was Mūsā ﷺ's proximity to his Lord at this time. Allah gave Mūsā ﷺ knowledge of what was happening among his people in his absence, and Mūsā ﷺ, being the fierest of all the prophets, lost his temper and shouted at the Lord, "O Allah, they would not have strayed so far, had You not let them!" But the Lord so loved Mūsā ﷺ that He was

not angered by Mūsā's ﷺ speech. No other prophet ever dared to speak to the Lord in this way.

47 — THE REVELATION OF THE TORAH

MŪSĀ ﷺ FASTED for forty days upon the mountain, then he asked the Lord, "Who art Thou?" and the Lord replied, "I am Allah beside whom there is no other god." At that moment Iblīs appeared to Mūsā ﷺ and tempted him. He said, "How do you know this is the truth? How do you know it is really the Lord and not some figment of your imagination?" "I know it is the truth for I perceive it with all my members and faculties. My whole being is suffused with this perception," Mūsā ﷺ replied. Sometimes we have such experiences in our dreams, but the prophets' vision takes place in a waking state. Mūsā ﷺ encountered his Lord in a spiritual meeting, and His words entered his perception as revelation. The Lord sent down a cloud of light upon Mūsā ﷺ which covered him and barred Shayṭān from approaching. Mūsā ﷺ entered the cover of this cloud and beheld the angels and the Divine Throne. Jibrā'īl ﷺ called to Mūsā ﷺ and said, "The Lord has sent me to you to offer you hospitality. Mount upon my wing." He extended his wing and it was bestudded with heavenly gems the like of which are not found on earth. Before Mūsā ﷺ, no mortal had been invited to ride on the wing of this angel. Jibrā'īl ﷺ thus transported him into the Presence of the Almighty Lord and the Lord spoke to Mūsā ﷺ and he alone could hear His words.

Allah Almighty then ordered the angel to bring the tablets of the Torah from the Garden of Eden. Upon them the Lord had written ten lines with the Hand of Power. According to a tradition of the Prophet Muhammed ﷺ, there are four things the Lord has revealed from His attribute of Power: The creation of Ādam ﷺ, the revelation of the Torah, the Tūbā tree in Paradise and the Gardens of Eden. The tablets were ten times Mūsā ﷺ's height and the angels carried them for Mūsā ﷺ when he descended from the mountain of Ṭūr.

The Lord spoke to Mūsā ﷺ, "I am your Lord, there is no God beside Me. You must attribute to Me no partners. Whoever attributes partners to Me will surely burn in Hell. Mūsā, give thanks to Me, be grateful to your parents and honour them. This is what your Lord has forbidden to you: Do not steal or appropriate goods unlawfully. Do not shed innocent blood. Adultery is a great sin in My eyes. Mūsā, whatever you wish for yourself you must also desire for your brother and all your people. Do not slaughter any animal without the mention of My Name, for if you do its meat will not be lawful to you. The Sabbath is a special day reserved for Me and you shall not work and there shall be no hunting on the Sabbath. This is forbidden to you and to all your people."

When Mūsā ﷺ heard the Words of his Lord, he felt a great desire to see the Lord with his own eyes. He was so consumed by love for Him that he said, "O Lord, show Yourself to me that I might gaze upon You." The Lord said, "No one has ever asked such a thing of Me. O Mūsā, how will you be able to support this vision, where will you find the strength? If anyone were to behold Me as I am, his mind and senses would leave him and he would perish of an instant." Mūsā ﷺ answered, "I would rather perish than live on without knowing You, O my Lord." The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "You can never behold Me directly but fix your gaze upon that mountain." Mūsā ﷺ did as he was commanded. First the Lord sent one order of angels to Mūsā ﷺ and they had the shape of great bulls. Their hoofbeats made the air tremble with thunder, and lightning surrounded them. "You are asking a tremendous thing," they roared at Mūsā ﷺ and their bellowing voices caused the earth to quake. Mūsā ﷺ began to tremble as he gazed at the angels who filled all the space up to the horizon, and he thought that he would die. Indeed, had he been any other than Mūsā ﷺ, he would have died right there and then. From another direction Mūsā ﷺ beheld a different host of angels who had the shape of terrifying lions, and they cried with one great voice, "*Lā ilāha illā llāh!* You have asked for an unheard of thing! You cannot even bear the sight of us, how then can you ask to behold the

Lord?" And Mūsā ﷺ nearly fainted away. When he raised his gaze once again, he beheld yet another band of angels which resembled great falcons, and their screeching and the flapping of their gigantic wings caused a violent storm around him as they arrayed themselves before him. Their presence was even harder to bear than that of the other angels. Behind him now, a fourth group of angels assembled, and their shape resembled that of men of overpowering strength and they evoked more fear than all the others. They repeated their warnings and Mūsā ﷺ nearly crumbled with awe. The angels were of the order of the Throne-bearing angels who resemble these four creatures in form: the bull, the lion, the falcon, and man.

When Mūsā's ﷺ gaze was fixed upon the mountain, the Lord sent down a tiny bit of His own Light — the amount that might pass through the eye of a needle or perhaps much less than that — and from the effect of that revelation of Divine Light the mountain split into seven parts, and crumbled into dust. Seeing this, Mūsā ﷺ let out a scream and fell senseless to the ground. One account has it that the Angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ caught him as he fell and restored him to life. Another account says that Mūsā ﷺ died and was given life a second time. When he regained consciousness Mūsā ﷺ said, "O Lord, I ask Thy forgiveness. I repent of my audacity, " and the Lord forgave him. But it is said that the Light he had witnessed affected his face in such a way that it had become too piercing for any living creature to withstand. Had looked at the mountain it would have melted, and had he looked upon men they would have been blinded or struck dead on the spot. "O Lord," cried Mūsā ﷺ, "what shall I do now? Nobody can withstand my gaze. How shall I fulfil my office as a prophet to my people if no one can bear to look at me?" The Lord answered him and said, "O Mūsā ﷺ, take the worn-out clothes of the poor who are patient or from the learned for My sake and make yourself a veil therefrom, for neither will the fire burn them, nor the light cause them to melt away." Mūsā ﷺ did so, and from that day on he wore a veil and no-one saw his face any more after that.

When the Lord revealed Himself to the mountain and all about Mūsā ﷺ fell into chaos and the terror seized him, Mūsā ﷺ called to the Lord, saying, "O my Lord, if I remain here I will be consumed, if I go I will die! O Lord, send to me Your Divine Support!" The Lord sent one ray of light from His Divine Throne, and He veiled it in seventy-thousand veils of light, yet a single veiled ray split the mountain into seven parts. Three pieces were flung to Medina, three to Mecca and one part is suspended between the heavens and the earth where it will orbit until the Day of Judgment. One part became the Jabal Nūr near Mecca, another Jabal Uḥud near Medina. This happened on a Thursday which was the day of 'Arafat. On Friday the Lord revealed the Torah and gave it to Mūsā ﷺ, and it was written in the Hebrew tongue. The word Torah means 'the Law' according to some sources, according to others it means 'that which is revealed from the Unseen'.

When the Lord gave the Torah to Mūsā ﷺ, He said to him, "Take what I have revealed to you, O Mūsā, and be grateful for it. Take the Torah to your nation and may they abide by it!" It is said that the Torah consisted of 800 words, some say of 114,000. Mūsā ﷺ said, "O my Lord, where can I find You?" The Lord answered, "You may seek Me in the hearts of those who have turned their backs on worldliness and are absorbed in contemplation of Me." Then Mūsā ﷺ asked, "O Lord, which of Your servants is dearest to You and most highly honoured?" The Lord answered, "It is he who forgives his enemy though he may have the means of seeking justice against him." The Lord also said, "O Mūsā, even if all the creatures in the heavens and on earth combined their forces to destroy one individual they would not be able to harm a single hair on his head if it be not My Will." And He, the Almighty said, "O Mūsā, if ever you are afraid of any high and mighty one, make your ablution and his evil will not touch you from him. For he who is in a state of ritual purity is in My charge and none can hurt him."

WAHB IBN AL-MUNABBIH relates, "I have read four verses in the Torah. The first: If a person reads the Holy Scripture and feels that it does not apply to him, it is as if he was making

light of Allah's Book, not taking His revelation seriously. The second: If a person experiences some misfortune and complains of those who have done him wrong, it is as if he had complained against the Lord of the Worlds. The third: If an unliked thing happens to a person and he is angered by it, it is as if he was malcontent with the Lord's order of the world. The fourth: If a person humbles himself before a rich man in the hope of attaining some profit, he has lost two-thirds of his faith."

The Lord gave a description of the Torah to his beloved Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. The Torah consisted of 1000 chapters, each containing 1000 verses and the Banī Isrā'īl carried it with them on their journey on seventy camels.

JĀBIR IBN 'ABDULLĀH relates that the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ told him: The Lord gave to Mūsā ﷺ the tablets of the Torah and upon them was written, "I am the Lord, Allah. Attribute no partners to Me, for those who attribute partners to Me, I will burn them in the fires of Hell. Give thanks to Me, and honour your father and mother. Do not swear falsely by My Name and envy no-one, for envy is the enemy of My Bounty. Be content with what I have given to you, for whoever is not content with his lot is not of My servants. Give your heart to none but Me alone and keep far from pride. Love your brother as you love yourself and keep the Sabbath."

'ABDULLĀH IBN SALĀM relates: "Allah Almighty says in the Torah, 'I will send a prophet from the line of Ismā'īl and his name will be Ahmad. Whoever believes in him will be rightly guided and My curse is upon him who disbelieves.'"

It is related from Abū Dardā' that KA'B AL-AḤBĀR said: "There is a verse in the Holy Torah which says, 'Know ye that the desire of the righteous is the meeting with Me and it is My desire to be joined with them. Whoever desires Me will find Me and who desires other than Me will not find Me." Abū Dardā' replied, "I have heard these same words from our Holy Prophet ﷺ."

It is reported that the Banī Isrā'īl were very upset when Pharaoh's host was drowned in the sea, and they cried and asked Mūsā ﷺ, "Who is the most learned person among us?" Mūsā ﷺ

answered them and said, "There is none among you that knows more than I."

When Mūsā ﷺ came down from the mountain with the tablets of the Torah and found his people engaged in abominations and worship of the golden calf, he grew exceedingly angry and dashed the tablets to the ground so that they were broken, and the words upon them flew back to the heavens. Then he turned to his brother Hārūn, pulled him by the beard and shouted at him, as is related in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Mūsā said, 'What prevented thee, Hārūn, when thou sawest them in error, so that thou didst not follow after me? Didst thou then disobey my commandment?*

'Son of my mother,' Hārūn said, 'take me not by the beard or the head! I was fearful that thou wouldst say, Thou hast divided the Banī Isrā'īl, and thou hast not observed my word.'" [Ṭā Hā, 20:92–94]

Hārūn ﷺ said, "O my brother, do not heap blame on me and make me not ridiculous in front of our enemy. I tried to prevent this, but they threatened me and nearly killed me, saying I was merely jealous of them. So I went aside with 12,000 of the faithful and we worshipped the Lord and were loyal to our word."

Seeing Mūsā's ﷺ wrath, a number of the others regretted what they had done and wished to repent. But in those days repentance was not as easy as it is today for the nation of Muḥammad ﷺ. For us it is enough to say, "O Lord, I repent of my sin and return to You. Do Thou forgive me," and the Lord forgives us in His endless mercy. In the time of Mūsā ﷺ however, the sinner's deed was written upon his forehead and he was unable to blot it out or erase its trace. Repentance required that a person leave his home and become an outcast, or that he distribute all his wealth among the poor, or that he put an end to his own life, or that he be put to death. The Lord commanded that all the repentant sinners be put to death by the sword by those 12,000 who had remained faithful. "Either they accept this as their atonement or they continue life as unbelievers and transgressors of the law."

The repentant all accepted their punishment and the next morning, at sunrise, the sentence was to be carried out. The

12,000 armed themselves with their swords, but their hearts were heavy, for it was their own kith and kin they were ordered to put to death. They nearly despaired of being able to carry out the Divine Command. The Lord sent down a thick black fog which enveloped them all so they could not recognize whom they were striking. From the early morning till late that afternoon the swords did their grisly task and before the sun set it was done. Then the dense fog lifted and they could see the severed heads and blood-drenched sands. Seventy-thousand people were put to death that day. Mūsā ﷺ fell upon his face and cried to the Lord, "O Allah, the Banī Isrā'īl are ruined now. There are hardly enough of us left to bury the dead." "Are you not pleased with My Command?" asked the Lord, "Those who repented and suffered their punishment are now in Paradise, for I have forgiven them, and those who carried out the judgment are promised Paradise, for they have obeyed Me. Could you desire any better for them than that?" Mūsā ﷺ then found no reply to his Lord and began to teach his remaining people the commandments of the Torah.

The Lord had revealed that they should pray fifty times a day and that they should give a quarter of their earnings as poor due. They were commanded to wash seven times to clean themselves from major impurity, and if some impure matter (such as blood or excrement) soiled their clothing it was not sufficient to wash out that spot with water, but rather they had to cut the part out of their clothing and bury it. If they committed a major sin, the punishment was death by the sword and their atonement was heavy before they could attain forgiveness. Adulterers, be they men or women, were to be buried in the sand up to their necks and stoned to death. People were to fast six months of the year and to break their fast only in the hour between dusk and nightfall. All the fifty daily prayers were to be prayed communally in their house of worship. When Mūsā ﷺ had informed them of their obligations people said, "But we cannot possibly fulfill all of that. It is far too heavy for us!" Mūsā ﷺ answered, "But you yourselves asked to be given the law of the Torah. Now you refuse it?"

Mūsā ﷺ ordered them to prostrate before the Lord but their pride prevented them and they said, "No, we cannot and we will not do this, even if the Lord brings the mountain down on our heads!" No sooner had they said this than the mountain of Ṭūr rose up in the air and hovered above, threatening to crush them. Then they obeyed and fell down upon their faces, but their fear was not so great as to prevent them from peering out sideways with one eye to see whether the mountain had gone back to its place. This is the posture they assume in prayer to this very day when they perform a prostration once a year.

And what happened to the Sāmirī? He too was punished, but he was not forgiven as long as he lived. He was exiled from the community of men, and for the remainder of his life no-one was allowed to speak or listen to him and he became an outcast. He took to the hills in the wilderness and lived out his days among the wild beasts.

48 – THE STORY OF QĀRŪN

AFTER THE REPENTANCE and punishment of the guilty Mūsā ﷺ turned to the object that had caused all this trouble and decided to burn the golden calf. But as the idol was made of metal it would not burn. Mūsā ﷺ prayed to the Lord for advice and the Lord sent Jibrā'īl ﷺ to reveal to Mūsā ﷺ that a certain herb which grew on the banks of the Nile had the property of turning any metal that was burnt with it into gold, and if gold were burnt with it the gold would turn to ashes. Mūsā ﷺ sent one of his relatives to fetch this alchemical herb and his choice fell on his nephew Qārūn, his elder brother's son. Qārūn was a greedy man and when he heard of the wonderful properties of this weed, he picked not only a handful of it as Mūsā ﷺ had ordered but brought back a whole camel-load. A handful of it he gave to Mūsā ﷺ, and the rest he dried and hid away. The golden calf was then burnt with the help of this weed and its ashes were strewn into the Nile. Then all the Israelites had to drink from the waters and by the Will of the Lord people's

inner condition became evident after they had drunk. If a person's faith was weak, his head turned into the head of an ox or an ass, and he died shortly afterwards. Those of sound faith were unaffected by this drink.

Qārūn secretly busied himself with converting all the metal he could find into gold with the help of the alchemical weed and before long he had amassed a tremendous treasure in this way. The keys alone to his treasure chests and safes filled seven camel loads. In the end he had so much gold that he hardly knew what to do with it. The doors of his donkey-stables and were made of gold, their reins and bridles were golden every button on his vest was made of yellow gold. One day Mūsā ﷺ taught his people the verses concerning the giving of *zakāt*, the poor-tax. It was made incumbent on them to pay one quarter of their earnings to the poor to make their possessions lawful to them.

Qārūn grew extremely wealthy but in his heart he was envious of Mūsā ﷺ, because Mūsā ﷺ was loved and honoured more by his people than he. All his riches were nothing compared to the honour of prophethood. Mūsā ﷺ came to Qārūn to remind him of the tax he was bound to pay by the law of the Torah, but Qārūn's avarice was so great that it hurt him to part with so much of his property. The Lord revealed to Mūsā ﷺ that as a special favour and an exception Qārūn should be allowed to pay only one-fortieth of his fortune. Still Qārūn was not happy with his Lord's decree. The Lord further eased his burden and let him know that even the hundredth part, and finally even the thousandth part of what he owned would be enough to clear him of blame, but the rich man could not bring himself to part voluntarily with even the smallest bit of his wealth.

Qārūn's envy and resentment grew every time the prophet reminded him of his duties, and he began to speak ill of Mūsā ﷺ and malign him in every way he could. He disobeyed the Divine Command to pay *zakāt*, for he was too proud to follow another's orders. He began to spend of his wealth in order to gain influence over people, and he soon bought himself a con-

siderable following. People are always easily corrupted when they are given what they desire. Qārūn organized fun fairs and festivities for his people and he entertained them with all manner of frivolous diversions on these occasions. He showered his guests with gifts of gold and coins to ensure they would return another time. Qārūn himself liked to ride around in a chariot, drawn by gold-reined horses or oxen and surrounded by an entourage of white slave-girls in scarlet wraps and naked to the waist. He loved to display his wealth and power and secretly he dreamed of himself becoming king.

Many people were tempted by him to forsake the straight path and to lead a life of similar luxury and worldly pleasures. Their companions warned them and tried to dissuade them from following their desires and pointed to the prohibitions of the Law which Mūsā ﷺ had brought to them when they had asked for it. But few people listened, for the seeds of corruption had already sprouted in their hearts. Now a certain day had been fixed for Mūsā ﷺ to speak before the whole assembly of the Banī Isrā'īl and all the tribes were going to be present. Qārūn had long been preparing for this day, intending to publicly discredit Mūsā ﷺ the prophet. He had bribed a loose woman who was with child to publicly identify Mūsā ﷺ as the father of her baby. The day came and a dais was set up, and Mūsā ﷺ took his place in the seat of honour. The assembly began. Qārūn stood up and said, "O Mūsā, I have a few questions concerning the Law. What is the punishment for a thief and how is the adulterer to be punished?" Mūsā ﷺ replied, "According to the Holy Law of the Torah, the thief shall have his right hand cut off and the adulterer, if he be married, shall be placed in a well up to his neck, then he shall be stoned until the well is full up with stones and he either lives or dies." "And if it was yourself, O Mūsā, would the Law be any different, since you are a prophet?" "No," said Mūsā ﷺ, "there is no exception to the Law of the Lord." Then Qārūn triumphantly called to the woman he intended to use as witness against Mūsā ﷺ and he asked her, "Who is the father of your child?" It was agreed that she was to tell everyone that he was Mūsā ﷺ the prophet,

but when she tried to speak these words, her tongue twisted and she could not voice them. Qārūn then spoke for her and said, "This woman is too shy to speak out, so I will tell you. She has become pregnant through adultery. The father of her child is Mūsā, your prophet!"

When Mūsā ﷺ heard this outrageous allegation, he flew into such a rage that he trembled from head to toe. "O Lord," he cried, "will You let them utter such slander and calumny against me while I am Your servant and prophet? Are You not the Dealer of Justice? Exonerate me from their monstrous accusation!" The Lord heard his cry and sent the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ to tell Mūsā ﷺ to touch the belly of the woman with his staff. Mūsā ﷺ did so and by the miracle power which the Lord gave to Mūsā ﷺ, the child within her womb spoke up and his speech was heard plainly by all those present in the assembly "*Lā ilāha illā llāh, Mūsā rasūlullāh,*" spoke the voice of the unborn child. "Listen, O Banī Isrā'īl, Mūsā ﷺ is your prophet and he is forever protected from committing major sins such as that which he stands accused of. My father is a certain shepherd who lives in a place I will describe to you." They fetched this shepherd and the man confirmed that he knew the woman and that he was the father of her child. All the people were overawed at the miracle they had just witnessed and the revelation of power and truth, but Mūsā's fury was undiminished. The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā ﷺ, I place the earth under your command so that you may punish him as you wish." Mūsā ﷺ did give Qārūn a chance: "Do you repent of what you have done and do you retract your words? If you do not, I will order the earth to swallow you." Hearing these threats, Qārūn's following quickly changed sides and most ran back to Mūsā ﷺ's camp. Qārūn however was stubborn and refused to repent. So Mūsā ﷺ ordered the earth to swallow him. The earth obeyed and swallowed Qārūn and his followers up to their ankles. "Stop, stop!" cried Qārūn, "I will give you whatever you want me to pay in *zakāt.* I will give you as much money as you wish, for that is all you really want of me!" "Swallow him!" Mūsā ﷺ ordered the earth a second

time, and the earth swallowed him up to his knees. "I will give you more," cried Qārūn, "I will give you a quarter of all I own." Mūsā ﷺ said to the earth, "Swallow him!" The earth swallowed Qārūn up to his navel. "Oh, tell her to stop!" cried Qārūn, "and I will give you even more, half of all my possessions. Is that not enough for you?" "Swallow him!" ordered Mūsā ﷺ and the earth rose up to his neck. "I will give you all that I own," cried Qārūn, and those were his last words, for Mūsā ﷺ ordered the earth to swallow him completely and his voice was not heard again. It is said that the punishment of Qārūn is yet continuing and the earth is still swallowing him, little by little into the depths of molten lava. We should heed the lesson of this tale and take care to which side we ally ourselves. When Qārūn had disappeared in the earth, some people still grumbled and said, "Is it a wonder that Mūsā ﷺ would not release him? Now that he is gone, all his gold is left to Mūsā ﷺ anyway ..." To silence these evil tongues Mūsā ﷺ ordered the earth to swallow up all of Qārūn's wealth as well, so that both Qārūn and all his gold went down together from Mūsā's anger and curse.

49 — THE PROMISED LAND

ONE DAY, while the Banī Isrā'īl were encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai, Mūsā ﷺ saw a great dust cloud in the distance. As it approached, he recognized it as his father-in-law, Shu'ayb ﷺ with his daughter, Mūsā's wife and her two sons. Mūsā ﷺ rose to greet them and they rejoiced and told each other all that had transpired since they had parted. They stayed together for some time and then Shu'ayb ﷺ left Mūsā ﷺ to pursue his destination.

The Banī Isrā'īl had been promised a land of their own, and after some time Mūsā ﷺ gathered the tribes round him and said to them, "The Lord has ordered us to continue on our way and to seek the promised land and to enter it in peace or in war, as we will be shown." But people knew that the land Mūsā ﷺ

was leading them towards was inhabited by the Amalakites, a tribe greater in size and stronger than they and they were afraid to fight them. They said to Mūsā ﷺ, "Let us send messengers into the land first to find out what conditions prevail there before we go forth." So messengers were dispatched, twelve in number, to scout out the Promised Land.

There was a great giant, 'Uj ibn 'Unq, who lived in Palestine, and he was the tallest man ever to have lived. His little finger was five and a half yards long. 'Uj had been a young man in the time of Ādam and though he remained an unbeliever, the Lord had prolonged his life and sent him his provision. Now 'Uj saw the little men of Israel entering his land and he scooped them up in his hand and brought them to the Amalekite queen who ruled over the land. This queen was a wise and just ruler and she regarded the Israelites carefully. "It will not do to have them killed," she thought, "then they are of no use to us. I will test them and then decide." She presented them with a giant watermelon that had grown in the country and ordered them to take it back to their leaders. None of the men could lift the fruit and they could not roll it all the way home. After discussing the matter among themselves they took a long pole and bored it right through the melon so that they could carry it on their shoulders. The queen realised that they were men of great intelligence and she decided to welcome them into her realm, so that the land would profit from their wisdom.

The twelve messengers on their homeward journey decided not to tell anybody at home about what they had seen in the land, for they knew that if they told stories of the giant Amalakites and of 'Uj ibn 'Unq, the Israelites would never agree to go there. When they came back to their people however, only two of them were able to stick to their resolution to keep silent. One of these men who showed strength of character was Yūsha' who was to later become a prophet. As a result of the stories they heard from the messengers, the Banī Isrā'īl said to their prophets, "No, Mūsā, we will not go there. You may go ahead with your Lord and fight for us. When all is settled we will follow."

As it is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*They said, 'Mūsā, we will never enter it so long as they are in it. Go forth, thou and thy Lord and do battle. We will be sitting here.' He said, 'O my Lord, I rule no one except myself and my brother. So do Thou divide between us and the people of the ungodly.'*" [The Table, 5:24–25]

Mūsā ﷺ and Hārūn ﷺ took their staffs and left their people. The giant 'Uj was watching all this from afar and when he saw that both the prophets had gone, he lifted up a great rock and raised it over his head. Then he loped along with giant strides, threatening to throw the huge rock and bury the whole nation of Israel beneath it. Mūsā ﷺ and Hārūn perceived the giant advancing as a great cloud of dust and sought refuge with the Lord. The Lord strengthened their heart and sent a little bird against 'Uj. This bird came flying straight out of hell. In its beak it held the smallest pebble and with it pelted the giant 'Uj. This pebble from hell fell on top of the mountain 'Uj was carrying and burned its way right through the rock, down into 'Uj's skull, through his brain and all the way down to his feet. 'Uj fell down slain, and Mūsā ﷺ was the cause of his undoing. This is how his long life ended.

The prophets Mūsā ﷺ and Hārūn had not been gone long before their people realised what they had done and they felt great shame and remorse for sending away the prophets whom the Almighty Lord had sent to them and to whom they were so deeply obliged. They decided to follow after them and fight alongside. The next day, they set out and travelled till nightfall when they set up their camp. When they awoke the next morning, they discovered they were still in the place they had set out from the day before. Again they set out and wandered until evening and again they found themselves in the same place the next morning. Day after day the same thing happened until they realised that it was the doing of the Lord. He was angered against them and they were trapped.

One day they saw the prophets returning to them and they were joyful and said, "Good news to you, O people of Isrā'īl, the enemy is put down and we are free to enter the promised

land." But the Lord had decided to punish the Banī Isrā'īl for their lack of steadfastness.

"*Said He, 'Then it shall be forbidden for them for forty years, while they are wandering the earth; so grieve not for the people of the ungodly.'*" [The Table, 5:26]

The Lord imprisoned them there in the wilderness of Tih for a full forty years and they were powerless against His Will. They were condemned to roam the wilderness and always found themselves back at their starting place the next morning, no matter in which direction they had ventured. The desert of Tih lies between Palestine and the Red Sea; it is waterless and nothing grows there. They grew hungry and weary there and began to lament and yearn for the life they had left behind in Egypt. They forgot that they had been ill-treated captives there, and that Mūsā ﷺ had led them out of slavery. All they could think of was food. Mūsā ﷺ prayed to the Lord to remember them and the Lord sent down from heaven two kinds of food: *manna* and *salwa*. This is what they lived on for as long as they dwelt in the wilderness of Tih. The *manna* was a substance which rained down at night onto the scrubs and bushes of the desert. It was a light and flaky substance which they would gather in the morning for their breakfast. It was sweet and delicious and it is still found in that area today. Salwa was a small bird like a pheasant which fell down from the sky, and everyone ate his fill but no more. It was not permitted for them to store up any of this heavenly food till the next day, except on the day before the Sabbath, for on this day of rest no work was lawful to them and no birds fell from heaven.

50 — THE STORY OF MŪSĀ AND KHIḌR ﷺ

ONE DAY Mūsā ﷺ was preaching from the wells of wisdom contained in the Holy Torah, and his people were profoundly stirred by his words They sighed and asked, "O Mūsā , is there anyone wiser than you?" Mūsā ﷺ answered, "I think not for

the Lord has sent me to be your prophet in this timem and He has given me all the wisdom there is to dispense."

The Lord was displeased by these words and He addressed Mūsā ﷺ. "O Lord," said Mūsā ﷺ, "show me this servant of Yours whose wisdom is greater than my own. Where can I find him?" The Lord directed him towards the confluence of the two seas. "And how will I know him, my Lord?" "Take with you a big salted fish for your provision to last you along the way. In the place that salted fish comes back to life and swims away you will find My chosen servant." "What will he look like?" "He will be wearing a great cloak, like your own and you will know him by certain signs."

So Mūsā ﷺ set out with his companion Yūsha' . They journeyed for some time until they came to a place where the two waters met and formed between them a small island. There Mūsā ﷺ was overcome with the irresistible urge to sleep, and while he slept Yūsha' , his faithful companion kept watch. Suddenly, the fish they carried with them and of which they had been eating came alive and with a swish of its tail slipped into the water and swam away. After a while, Mūsā ﷺ awoke and they continued their journey. When they sat down again to rest Mūsā ﷺ said to Yūsha' , "Bring out the fish so that we might eat the other half." Only then Yūsha' remembered and said, "O my prophet, Shayṭān has made me forget what I ought to have told you as soon as you awoke: When you lay down to sleep the fish came to life and took off down the river." "That is the sign we have been waiting for," said Mūsā ﷺ, "quickly, show me the place where this happened, for there we will meet that servant of the Lord whose wisdom is greater than mine." They retraced their steps, until they found the place where Mūsā ﷺ had been overcome by sleep, and there they saw a man sitting on the bank of the river, wrapped in his cloak. Mūsā ﷺ gave him *salāms* and the man answered him with greetings of peace. Mūsā ﷺ then said to him, "O my Lord's special servant, will you not accept me as your companion and teach me of your wisdom?" The man answered, "Thank Allah for the knowledge He has given to you and I shall thank Him for what He has giv-

en to me. He has bestowed on each a different sort of wisdom and you will not be able to carry my knowledge; you have neither the strength nor the patience." But Mūsā ﷺ insisted that he teach him and said:

"*'Yet thou shalt find me, if Allah will, patient and I shall not rebel against thee in anything.' Said he, 'Then if thou followest me, question me not on anything until I myself introduce the mention of it to thee.'*" [The Cave, 18:69–70]

Finally, the man agreed to try him, and after Mūsā ﷺ had sent Yūsha' back to his people, the two men set out in a boat down the river, Mūsā ﷺ, the prophet and Khiḍr, the Lord's special servant. The ferrymen, seeing their passengers were holy men charged nothing for the passage and asked only that they pray for them. As they were being rowed across, a sparrow chanced to alight on the rim of their boat and it took a tiny beakful of water to drink. Khiḍr ﷺ said to Mūsā ﷺ, "All the knowledge which the Lord has given to us is as the amount of water that little bird held in its beak, compared to the vastness of the Sea of Knowledge of our Lord."

When they had reached the other bank of the river and the boat people had gone off, Khiḍr ﷺ began to pry planks off the boat and throw them one by one into the water, so that it leaked and began to sink. Mūsā ﷺ was disturbed and cried, "What are you doing? These people took us along for nothing and showed us goodness, and in return you are destroying their boat?!" "Did I not tell you that you would have not the patience to bear with me?" said Khiḍr ﷺ. "Oh, I forgot," said Mūsā ﷺ, "please forgive me. I will try not to forget again." They continued their journey on foot. Before long they came upon a number of children playing by the roadside. One of them was a particularly charming youngster who smiled at everyone. Khiḍr ﷺ, as he passed the child raised his hand and struck him so that he fell lifeless to the ground. Mūsā ﷺ was appalled and could not help himself but to exclaim, "O servant of my Lord, what have you done? How can it be righteousness that you slew an innocent child who has not yet reached the age of majority so as to be held responsible for his actions? What can a child have

done to deserve death as a punishment? Surely this is a gross misjudgment and a grievous error!" "Did I not warn you that you would never be able to put up with me?" answered Khiḍr ﷺ. Mūsā ﷺ realised that he had broken his word a second time and he grew ashamed and said, "Forgive me once more, my friend; if I fail you again, I will agree to our parting of ways."

They continued along their way. At last they came to a town and wished to stay there for the night, but none of the townspeople would offer them hospitality, nor were they given anything to eat, though they asked for food. They passed outside the city and came to a ruined building one wall of which was on the verge of collapse. Khiḍr ﷺ said, "*Bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*," and set to the task of repairing the wall, stone upon stone, until it stood firm again. Mūsā ﷺ puzzled over this and said, "For this you could have taken wages then we would have had food and shelter for the night." "Now is the time of parting between me and thee" said Khiḍr ﷺ, for Mūsā ﷺ had broken his word for the third time. Mūsā ﷺ saw that this was true and felt great remorse. "Nevertheless," said Khiḍr ﷺ, "I will now explain to you the meaning behind my actions so that you might learn from them, but first we must sit down to eat, for we are both hungry and tired from the journey."

As they sat down to rest, a deer came springing out of nowhere and Khiḍr ﷺ halted it with a wave of his hand. The deer fell to the ground, slaughtered and skinned, one half of it ready cooked, the other half raw. "The roasted half is for me," said Khiḍr ﷺ, "for I have done my work for the sake of Allah Almighty, and in His endless bounty He has rewarded me. The raw half of the deer is for you, since you saw it fit to ask for reward for your labour, hence you must also work to prepare your own provision." "But how shall I do this?" cried Mūsā ﷺ who was very hungry and tired. "How shall I find firewood and cooking gear in the dark? Come, let us share your roasted half which is ready to eat now and which smells so delicious — surely it will suffice us both." Khiḍr ﷺ said, "All right, eat of it, if you might." Mūsā ﷺ reached out to take a piece of the roasted meat, but when he put it in his mouth he found it had become

raw again in his hand and was dripping with blood. Every time he took a morsel and tried to eat it, the same thing would happen and he could not eat a single bite. "It seems you must cook your own meal after all," said Khiḍr ﷺ. So Mūsā ﷺ went and collected wood to cook the meat while Khiḍr ﷺ finished his own meal and performed his devotions.

When they had both finished eating Khiḍr ﷺ took the remains of the meal and wrapped them up in the deerskin. He stroked the bundle with his hand and the deer became whole and alive again and sprang off into the woods. "Now I will explain to you the hidden wisdom of my actions," said Khiḍr. "The first case in which you showed no patience was this: By the river, there lived several brothers who jointly possessed a boat. They ferried passengers across the river and made a profit from this occupation. These people were good to us and took no money for their services and they are believers in the Lord Almighty Allah. But unknown to them there was a greedy king further upstream who had sent out his men to seize by force all boats that looked sturdy and functional and in a state of good repair. He would have appropriated the boat these good people owned and they would have been left with nothing. Therefore, I helped them by damaging their boat a bit and making it look shabby and neglected, so the king's henchmen would not cast their greedy eye on it. The second instance was the innocent child I slew. It was shown to me that his parents were steadfast believers, while it was written for that child to become a great sinner, and that his criminal actions would cause his parents great pain in the future. So the Lord ordered me to remove him from this world while he was yet in a state of innocence and unable to cause his parents grief through his godlessness. The Lord revealed to me also that He meant to give the couple another child who would be the ancestor of seventy prophets. The third episode occurred in this town which refused us hospitality. Although the inhabitants of the town are evil people, yet I repaired this wall, for the Lord informed me that among them are living two orphans whose father was a righteous man. Underneath this wall there is a buried treasure which rightful-

ly belongs to them, it is their inheritance. Had the wall been allowed to crumble, the people of this town would have found this treasure before the two orphans came of age and they would have been left empty-handed. In this way, I secured a future for them. In every case I acted not on my own but upon the Command of my Lord, Allah Almighty." Having spoken these words Khiḍr ﷺ departed and Mūsā ﷺ saw him no more.

51 – MŪSĀ'S ﷺ CONVERSATION WITH THE LORD

IT IS RELATED that Allah spoke to Mūsā ﷺ, "Is there any thing you have done for My sake?" Mūsā ﷺ replied, "O my Lord, I have prayed, I have fasted, I have performed *dhikr* and I have given alms." The Lord said, "Prayer is proof and fasting is paradise for you, almsgiving is as shadow and *dhikr* as light for you, but what have you done purely for My sake?" Mūsā ﷺ replied "O Lord, show me what to do, so that I may perform an action for Your sake alone. "The Lord told him, "When you love a person, love him for My sake, and if you do not love a person, then feel that way for My sake."

It is related that the Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, make My servants love Me and tell them of My favours, so that they might learn to love Me." Mūsā ﷺ said, "O Lord, what is the reward of a person who stands in prayer while his people are asleep?" The Lord answered, "Mercy will rain upon that person and his heart will be enlightened and his supplication will be accepted. For each *rak'a* he prays at night I will write one hundred times the reward of one *rak'a* prayed during the daytime, and I will build a palace of gold for him in paradise."

Again it is related that the Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, verily I have honoured the nation of Muḥammad with three holy names, and no nation have I honoured so highly before this. If a person in need invokes Me, calling upon these holy names, surely I will grant his prayer." Mūsā ﷺ asked, "And what are these holy names?" "They are *bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni*

r-raḥīm," said the Lord. A blind man was with Mūsā ﷺ and he heard Mūsā ﷺ speak these names; so he repeated them and the Lord restored his eyesight, and he saw.

Mūsā ﷺ said, "O Lord, You have made me Your speaker, *kalīmullāh*, and You have made Muḥammad Your Beloved, *ḥabībullāh*. Tell me what is the difference between us two?" The Lord said, "O Mūsā ﷺ, the meaning of *kalīm* is that all his works are performed for My good pleasure and the meaning of *ḥabīb* is that all My works are for his sake. One loves the Lord, and the other is beloved by the Lord."

The Lord also said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, if you remember Me, I will remember you." And the Almighty said, "O Mūsā, I have built a house for the sons of man and I have made it a safe haven for them. This house is made of light and its place is in the hearts of man. Its foundation is knowledge and its roof is faith. It is lit by yearning in the daytime and by love at night. Its pastures are righteousness and its mountains certainty, its gardens are aspiration. Its thunder is fear and its lightning is hope. In its clouds lies virtue and in its rain pity. The trees are obedience, their leaves fulfilment, and their fruits wisdom. The rivers are experience and the days are understanding, the nights ignorance. This house had four doors: knowledge, forbearance, patience and gratitude."

Mūsā ﷺ asked of the Lord, "O Lord, how can I know a servant whom You love from a servant against whom You are angered?" The Lord answered, "O Mūsā, when I love a servant, I implant in him the remembrance of Me and both heaven and earth will remember him; I protect him from disobedience and safeguard him from punishment. But when I am angered at a servant, I cause him to be heedless and to forget the remembrance of Me and he will be disobedient and I will make punishment come upon him lawfully." Mūsā ﷺ then asked, "What are the signs of a servant who has earned Your Wrath?" The Lord said, "O Mūsā, his heart is full of pride, his tongue speaks harsh words, his eye stares at what is forbidden, and his hand is tight."

QUWWAT AL-QULŪB says, "The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, tell My servants: he is My friend whose inner qual-

ities are better than his outward ones, and he is My enemy of whom the reverse is true."

When Allah drowned Pharaoh and his men, Mūsā ﷺ asked the Lord to reveal to him some way to show gratitude for the Lord's favour to him. Allah told him to repeat the words *lā ilāha illā llāh*. Mūsā ﷺ asked for more than this but the Lord said to him, "O Mūsā, if I were to place all the heavens and the earth on one side and these words upon the other, these words would tilt the balance to their side."

Mūsā ﷺ asked the Lord, "You have given me miraculous powers and a staff from the branches of Paradise. You have sent down *manna* and *salwa* from heaven for me and You have destroyed Pharaoh and all his men for My sake. Can there be any one of Your servants more highly honoured in Your sight than I?" The Lord replied, "There is one prophet and his nation who are more highly honoured than any other creature to whom I gave life. This is my beloved Muḥammad and his nation."

One day Mūsā ﷺ asked the angel, "Does my Lord ever sleep?" The Lord ordered Mūsā ﷺ to take two vessels filled with water and to hold them aloft, continuously. Finally, Mūsā ﷺ was overcome with sleep and the vessels tumbled down and broke, spilling the water. The Lord then said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, now you see, if ever I were to sleep, the heavens and the earth would fall and break, spilling their contents, just as those earthenware jugs have done."

It is related that Mūsā ﷺ asked the Lord, "Is there a place that is dearer to You than any other?" "Yes," answered the Lord, "there is such a place." "And who inhabits this place, O Lord?" "Three groups of people enter that place, O My prophet: Those who are patient with the trials I send to them, those who are grateful for what I have given them, and those who are content when I send death to them."

The Lord spoke to Mūsā ﷺ: "There are five attributes which belong to Me and five belonging to you. Lordship is Mine and servanthood is yours. The bestowal of favours is Mine and gratitude is yours. Answering is Mine while asking is yours. The decree of destiny is Mine and patience with it is yours. Majesty

belongs to Me and obedience to you.' Then the Lord said: "I have placed five things within five others, yet people seek them always in other places. I have placed knowledge within poverty, and people seek it in satiety. Secondly, I have placed satisfaction in the abandonment of desires, yet people seek it in their fulfilment. Thirdly, I have placed honour within obedience, while people seek it at the threshold of the mighty. Fourthly, I have put wealth within contentment and people seek it in the accumulation of riches. Fifthly, I have put comfort and ease in the eternal life to come and people seek it in this passing worldly life."

Allah said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, if a person obeys his parents and he disobeys Me, I will still write him in the book of the repentant and those deserving paradise, but if a person disobeys his parents, I will write him among the disobedient, even if He obeys My Commands."

Mūsā ﷺ asked the Lord, "What is the distance between the Throne and the Divine Court?" The Lord replied, "It is ten thousand times the distance between east and west."

One day Iblīs came to Mūsā ﷺ and said, "O Mūsā , the Lord has chosen you among all His servants to be His prophet. He has also created me, but I sinned and fell from my station on account of my disobedience. Now I wish to repent — please pray for me and intercede with your Lord on my behalf." Mūsā ﷺ prayed to the Lord that He might accept the repentance of Iblīs. Allah Almighty replied, "Tell Iblīs to go to Ādam's grave and to prostrate himself before it; then I will accept his repentance." Iblīs heard what the Lord had said and he flew into a rage and cried, "What! When Ādam was alive I did not bow before him, how much less will I do so now that he is dead and gone." Iblīs again refused to obey his Lord and his repentance was not accepted.

The Lord asked Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, do you wish for My Grace and Mercy to be closer to you than the words to your tongue and closer than the white to the black of your eye?" "O my Lord, I do wish for that." "Then you must frequently give *ṣalawāt* to My beloved Muḥammad Muṣṭafā," said the Lord.

It is related that Mūsā ﷺ said to the Lord, "O Lord, from Your Power You have created Ādam and You bestowed upon him so many favours. How did he thank You for all that?" The Lord answered, "He knew that everything came from Me." "O Lord, show me one way, one action

through which I might attain Your satisfaction!" "O Mūsā, if you show yourself satisfied with what I have decreed for you, then I too will be satisfied with you." And the Almighty said: "Whoever remembers Me, I will remember him. Whoever obeys Me, I will obey him, and whoever loves Me, I will also love him. Whoever seeks Me will find Me."

The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "You must teach the poor who seek Me with the same zeal with which you apply yourself to teaching the rich and powerful. For if you make a distinction, O Mūsā, the knowledge which you have taught will become as a grave for you and cover you like the soil, and on the Day of Judgment, your excellence will be diminished. Go and visit the sick and wash the robes of the poor!" After this Mūsā ﷺ went once a month to visit the sick and to wash the robes of the poor and humble.

MĀLIK IBN DĪNĀR relates that the Lord spoke to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, fashion for yourself a pair of sandals of tin and sheathe your staff with iron. Then go from house to house and from land to land in search of knowledge, until your shoes and your staff are worn out! Study My creation and learn from it!"

Mūsā ﷺ said, "O Lord, You have given me the Torah and spoken with me on Mount Ṭūr. There are four things I fear and my hope is set on one. I fear the bitterness of poverty and the throes of death. I dread the punishment of the grave and the Day of Judgment. My only hope is that You give my heart a love that will remain forever pure and untouched." The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, if you fear poverty, keep the prayer of *ishrāq*, you will be safe from poverty. If you fear the agony of death, pray the *awwabīn* prayer between *maghrib* and *'ishā'*. If you fear the punishment of the grave, pray two or four *rak'ats* during the night, and if you fear the Day of Judgment, fast during the month of Rajab. And Mūsā, there are three things I

will give to you if you can avoid three others: Keep your tongue from uttering lies and slander and I will give you great honour; secondly, keep yourself from bad company, and I will choose for you righteous companions. Thirdly, stay away from foods that are doubtful or forbidden and I will give you wisdom."

The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, there are four things you must not ask of Me, for I have not given them to those who went before you nor will I give them to those who are to come. Ask Me not for wealth so that you might revel in the glory of possession and men submit to you on account of your riches. Secondly, do not ask of Me knowledge of the Unseen, for no one can know of it except what I reveal. Thirdly, ask Me not to cut off the hearts of mankind from the hope of redemption, for I am their Creator and I have cast their lots and surely they will die and be resurrected, but even the hearts of sinners' are not cut off from hope. Fourthly, do not ask Me for permanence in this world, for I am the King of all Eternity and everything in this world is of passing and perishing nature."

The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "Even if all the seven seas were ink and all the trees were pens, even if all of mankind, jinn and angels were scribes and wrote down 70,000 pages, they would not have completed the description of even the first of the stations of Hell." Mūsā ﷺ asked, "How far then is it to hell? "Answered the Lord, "It is a road of 4,000 years and each year has 4,000 months one month has 4,000 days and each of these days has 70,000 hours; each hour is as 1,000 years which you know. Tell your people to please each other, then I will bring them into Paradise." "O Lord, what if they cannot make each other happy?" "Then let them please Me," said the Lord. "There are four things by which they can please Me: If they repent while their hearts are yet beating; if they ask for pardon with their tongues: if their eyes cry tears of remorse, and if all their members engage in service for My sake."

It is reported that there lived a person in the time of Mūsā ﷺ whose great pride lay in being the son of nine great forbears. The Lord ordered Mūsā ﷺ to say to him, "Including you and your forefathers, there will be ten more persons in hell."

The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "Two things you ought know, and you ought to keep from the knowledge of two other things: Know that I, your Lord, am One, but ask not to know how I am, for I have no 'howness'. Know also that I am the Provider and Sustainer, but ask not to know how and from where I give. And Mūsā, go not to the dwellings of the evildoers and oppressors even if they are ill, and do not go to the funerals of My enemies, for he who keeps friendship with My enemy is My enemy as well."

Mu'aẓẓim Jābir relates: "The Lord spoke four-hundred words to Mūsā ﷺ in three days. His last words were, 'Obey your father and your mother.' Mūsā ﷺ asked the Lord nine times, 'O Lord, what is Your final injunction?' The Lord said, 'Obey your mother,' nine times, and once He said, 'Obey your father.' The Lord also said, 'If a person obeys his parents in this world, I will give him honour during his life, and I will make his sojourn in the grave pleasant for him; on the Day of Gathering, I will show him mercy and guidance, and I will show Myself to him without intermediary. O Mūsā, the satisfaction of parents with their child is My satisfaction, and their anger is also my anger. Even if a person performs good actions throughout his life, yet is disobedient to his parents, I will not accept his worship and I will not grant him safety from Hell."

And it is related that Mūsā ﷺ said to the Lord, "I am a stranger and a poor man, and I am ill." The Lord said to him, "O Mūsā, to the stranger there is no friend the likes of Me, and for the indigent there is none that dispenses bounties as I do, and for the sick man there can be no doctor such as I."

The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "Your nine greatest faults are these: pride, covetousness, envy, speaking, eating and sleeping too much, love of wealth, fondness of flattery, and lack of thankfulness."

It is related from Ibn Mas'ūd, "The *sūra* of Tabāraka was revealed in the Torah. The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ that whoever recited this *sūra* during the night will find safety from the punishment of the grave."

The Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "Whenever you achieve a profit in your dealings, think of the Last Account; whenever you feel desire for the pleasures of this world, remember death; and whenever you are visited by affliction, pray to Me. When you sit down to eat, remember those who are hungry, and when you are about to commit a sin, remember Hell. When you fall ill, give *ṣadaqa* and you will find healing. If you are rich, enrich also your people."

The Lord said, "O Mūsā, you have come to know My treasures, leave off asking things from mankind. You have come to know My Kingdom, do not depart from My gate. You have come to know that My enemies are not dead, so do not give yourself over to complacency. As long as you have not cleansed yourself from all impurity, do not busy yourself with the defects of others. While you have not yet entered Paradise, do not deem yourself in safety."

This constitutes Mūsā's ﷺ converse with the Lord when he went up to the Mount of Ṭūr. He brought down the verses of the Torah to the Banī Isrā'īl and continued to teach what the Lord revealed to him. They dwelt in the desert of Tih and the years went by. One day his people came to him and complained of the unchanging diet of *manna* and *salwa* which the Lord sent to them from heaven. They desired a change and asked Mūsā ﷺ to pray to the Lord to send them the foods they had known in Egypt, the lentils, onions and garlic. Mūsā ﷺ grew very angry at their ungratefulness and said, "Go then, return to Egypt and eat there whatever you desire. Have you forgotten that our imprisonment in this desert is alone your doing! Had you only gone ahead into the promised land as you were ordered by the Lord, you would now have milk and honey and lack for nothing!"

"*And when you said, 'Mūsā we will not endure one sort of food; pray to thy Lord for us, that He may bring forth for us of that the earth produces green herbs, cucumbers, lentils and onions.'*

He said, 'Would you have in exchange what is meaner for what is better? Get you down to Egypt; you shall have there that which you demanded.'" [The Cow, 2:61]

52 — THE STORY OF THE COW

THERE LIVED in that time a rich man who had no children of his own. He took his brother's sons into his house and raised them as his own. He looked after them well and gave them the best education and in his will he left them all he had. Within their hearts however, there was the seed of evil, and they were unable to appreciate what their uncle had done for them. For if man's heart has no understanding, whatever you may do for him will be in vain. As the boys grew up they grew tired of waiting for their uncle's death so that they might possess themselves of all his wealth. They secretly murdered him one night and dragged his body to the borderline between two neighbouring villages and left him there.

The next day, they pretended to be searching for him and made a great show of being worried about their uncle. In the end, shepherds found the body in the field where they had laid him. Everyone was puzzled and appalled by this heinous crime, because the deceased had been a good man and had no enemies. The villagers began accusing the neighbouring villagers of the deed, and a dispute arose between them, and it would soon have come to blows. At last, someone thought of calling in the prophet Mūsā ﷺ to settle their problem, and people were sent out in search of him.

Now not far away, there lived a poor widow with her only son who was the pride and joy of her life. His father had possessed a yellow calf, and when he felt that his death was nigh, he had gone to the woods and prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, soon You will call me to surrender my soul and I return to You with pleasure. But what is to become of my wife and and my young son? This yellow calf I will leave in Your trust and I leave You my family to look after." Before he died, he said to his wife, "Wife, if ever your poverty becomes too hard and pressing on you, tell our son to go to a certain place in the woods and to call out for help. Then, by the Will of Allah, it will come to him." Then he lay down and died.

After his father's death, the boy earned a meagre living from collecting firewood and binding it into bundles which he carried on his back to the nearby markets. However little he earned from this hard labour, he divided it into three parts, two-thirds he would give to his mother to expend on the needs of their household, and the other third he would give to those even poorer than himself.

One day, he came home from work and had injured his back with the heavy burden he carried. He said to his mother, "If only we had a beast of burden to help me with this work, it would be so much easier." That night they both did not sleep; the boy was sleepless from pain and his mother from worry about him. At last she remembered what her late husband had said to her before he died. She told her son, "Your father has left something for you. Go into the woods to such-and-such a place and call out. Your father's beast will come to you there." The boy did as his mother bade him and called out at that clearing in the woods. At once, the yellow cow came out of the woods and she was tame and licked the boy's hands and face, as if she had always known him, although she had been living as a wild animal in the woods all this time. The boy happily led her home. He asked his mother for permission to sell the cow and set out for the market town. On the way he met a man who offered him twice the price he had thought of asking for the animal. The boy grew confused and said he must first ask his mother. The woman was overjoyed, for it was a very high price. He set out again with the cow and met the same man again. This time he offered him a price three times as high as his original bid. Again he went home to consult his mother and she said, "O my son, go now and sell the cow and accept whatever price you are offered. You have my permission, for they are offering you very good money."

So the boy set out once more and again he met the man he had met before and he told him that he accepted his offer. The man then said, "I may seem to you to be a man but in reality I am an angel of the Lord. This is what you must do. After a short while you will meet some men who will want to buy your

cow from you. As its price you must name all the gold which its hide will hold, and you must accept no less than that." The boy understood and the angel disappeared from his sight.

Meanwhile the troubled villagers had found Mūsā ﷺ and asked him to allay their conflict. "Perform a miracle for us," they said, "raise up the dead man and let him point out his own murderer. Then our case will be solved and we shall believe in all you tell us and obey your Lord." Mūsā ﷺ raised his hands in supplication and prayed to the Lord, and the Lord spoke to him, "This is My Command. Let them slaughter a cow and divide it into two parts. With the tongue and the tail let them strike the dead man's body, and My Wisdom will be known." Mūsā ﷺ informed the people of the Lord's Command, but they were skeptical and began to question Mūsā's ﷺ revelation, as it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*And when Mūsā said to his people, 'Allah commands you to sacrifice a cow.' They said, 'Dost thou take us in mockery?'*

He said, 'I take refuge in Allah, lest I should be one of the ignorant.'

They said, 'Pray to the Lord for us that He may make clear to us what she may be.'

He said, 'He says she is a cow neither old, nor virgin, middling between the two; so do that which you are bidden.'

They said, 'Pray to thy Lord for us which that He make clear to us what her colour may be.'

He said, 'He says she shall be a golden cow, bright her colour, gladdening to the beholder.'

They said, 'Pray to thy Lord for us that He make clear to us what she may be. Cows are much alike to us and, if Allah wills, we shall then be guided.'

He said, 'He says she shall be a cow nor broken to plough the earth or to water the tillage, one kept secure, with no blemish on her.'

They said, 'Now thou hast brought the truth,' and therefore they sacrificed her, a thing they had scarcely done. And when you killed a living soul and disputed thereon and Allah disclosed what you were hiding, so We said, 'Smite him with part of it;' even so Allah brings to life the dead and He shows you His signs, that haply you may have understanding." [The Cow, 2:67–73]

Meanwhile, the boy had led his cow to market and it fulfilled all these conditions perfectly in that it was of the right colour, had been raised in the woods and never been employed in service, it was the right age and had not calved. People asked its price and the boy answered as the angel had told him to say, "This is a special cow, unlike others. Therefore, its price is also special. Its skin must be stripped and made into a bag. Then this must be filled to the brim with gold. That will be its price, no less." People grumbled, but Mūsā ﷺ reminded them of their promise, so in the end they accepted. They filled the cow's hide with gold and paid the poor widow's son. Then Mūsā ﷺ took the tail and the tongue of the animal and struck the dead man with these parts. The dead man sat up in his grave and pointed to his murderers. Justice was done. People witnessed the miracle they had demanded and the poor boy's fortunes were made. He had made his mother pleased with him and therefore Allah's Pleasure was on him, too.

53 — THE DEATH OF HĀRŪN ﷺ

MŪSĀ ﷺ AND HĀRŪN ﷺ went out into the desert one day and they came to a place where there grew a tree, which they had never seen before. Beneath the tree was a settee on which lay mats and cushions, inviting them to rest in the shade. Hārūn ﷺ had grown very old and he was tired and when he saw the ready-made bed he lay down upon it to rest his weary bones. In his sleep the angel came to him and Hārūn ﷺ surrendered his soul. Mūsā ﷺ looked on and saw what had happened and as he watched, the tree, the couch and his brother's body all disappeared from view. Mūsā ﷺ then said to the Lord, "O Lord, how shall I explain this to my people when I return to them?"

Indeed, when Mūsā ﷺ returned to the people without his brother Hārūn ﷺ, they instantly were suspicious and muttered amongst themselves, "We were fond of Hārūn ﷺ and Mūsā ﷺ knew this and was jealous. Hārūn ﷺ was a great prophet and his tongue was sweet. Mūsā ﷺ must have done away with

him and hidden his body in the desert where no one can find him." Mūsā ﷺ protested but suspicions persisted and people demanded that he show them proof of his story. He led them to the place in the desert where the tree and the couch had stood. But there was nothing to be seen. "How should we believe what you tell us," they accused Mūsā ﷺ, "how can a tree grow in one instant and disappear in the next? And what of a ready-made bed?" While they were yet grumbling, the Lord gave them proof of Mūsā ﷺ's truthfulness. He made the tree grow again in that spot and the bed with Hārūn's ﷺ body on it appear before their very eyes.

Hārūn's ﷺ soul also returned to him and he spoke to them, "O my people, do not think ill of my brother Mūsā ﷺ. My appointed time had come and I went to the meeting with my Lord. Know that the Lord loves the righteous and do not speak against my brother Mūsā ﷺ, ever!" Having spoken these words, the vision dissolved and the desert was as it had been before. People then said, "Now we believe that you were true. We did this only to try you."

54 — MŪSĀ'S ﷺ END

ONE DAY, Mūsā ﷺ fell ill and suffered greatly from his disease. He disliked ill health extremely and prayed to the Lord not to ever let him fall ill before he died nor to send death to him before he asked for it. The Lord granted his prayer and sent Jibrā'īl ﷺ to bring out the shirt of health from the stores of divine treasures. This shirt was given to Mūsā ﷺ and he wore it and never fell ill again.

Mūsā ﷺ also prayed, "O Lord, do not give me death until I am lying in the grave which I have dug for myself." The Lord granted him this wish also. One day the Angel of Death came to Mūsā ﷺ to take his soul. But the Lord had vouchsafed to Mūsā ﷺ that He would not take his life until he had dug his own grave.

Mūsā ﷺ was passing along the road one very hot day when he saw some people digging a grave. He stopped to watch

them, and it occurred to him that this grave would provide cool and welcome shade from the burning heat. Just then the people turned to him and asked him, "It is so hot and we are so very tired. Perhaps you can tell us whether we have dug long enough? This grave is intended for a person of exactly your size and stature." Mūsā ﷺ climbed into the grave in order to test it and he threw out a few handfuls of earth so that it fit him perfectly. At that very moment, 'Azrā'īl appeared and wished to take his soul. Mūsā ﷺ struck him violently with his fist, so that he lost an eye but the Lord gave him a new one at once. Then Mūsā ﷺ died and his life on earth had been 120 years.

After his death, the shirt of health which he had worn all his life was taken from him and the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to the Lord and asked to put it back into the Divine Treasure House. Allah Almighty said, "Whatever has gone out of My Treasure Houses once does not enter them again. Give it to the sun." So Jibrā'īl ﷺ clothed the sun in it. Therefore, all those who are ill, feel better during the day when the sun is shining, and at night they feel worse. Every morning the sun rises in its cloak of health which it will wear until the Day of Judgment.

55 — YŪSHA' عليه السلام

THE PROPHET YŪSHA' عليه السلام is mentioned several times in the Holy Qur'ān, though not by name. At the time he succeeded Mūsā عليه السلام he was eighty-two years old and had held the station of prophethood for twenty-eight years. He taught according to the Torah Mūsā عليه السلام had received from the Lord and led the Children of Israel into the promised land. Yūsha' عليه السلام was a descendant of Yūsuf عليه السلام, through Ephraim and Nūn. He had been a young man when the tribes left Egypt, and all his life he was Mūsā's عليه السلام faithful companion and servant. Yūsha' عليه السلام was a soldier of strength and courage but he was learned in the scriptures as well and the Lord gave him wisdom and granted him prophethood. Yūsha' عليه السلام accompanied Mūsā عليه السلام to the foot of Mount Nebo when the Lord called him there. Mūsā عليه السلام ascended to the heights from where he overlooked the promised land which he was not destined to enter. On Mount Nebo's summit, Mūsā عليه السلام received the Lord's last Commands to him, and when he returned to Yūsha' he informed him that he, Yūsha' , was to succeed him and lead his people into the promised land when the days of their punishment had ended.

Together they returned to the tribes and Mūsā عليه السلام told them what he had told Yūsha' عليه السلام and confided his flock to his care. He handed him the Holy Ark and the Scrolls of the Torah and preached his last sermon. Mūsā's عليه السلام grave has been long forgotten but with all probability it is situated in the hills of the eastern bank of the Jordan River. May peace be upon his inspired soul.

Mūsā عليه السلام was not yet buried, however, when the tribes got together to accuse Yūsha' عليه السلام of having murdered him, just as they had accused Mūsā عليه السلام of murdering his brother Hārūn عليه السلام aforetime. But Yūsha' عليه السلام confronted them and he was every bit as severe as Mūsā عليه السلام had been. He called them to order and

firmly exhorted them to obey and to follow him, for had Mūsā ﷺ not told them he was to lead them into the promised land? Yūsha' ﷺ immediately began the preparations for the march to their destination, and on the third day he received the Divine Command to have all the males of the tribes circumcised with knives of stone. Most of the older men who had left Egypt had died during the forty years in the wilderness and while they were roaming the desert they had not found opportunity to circumcise the young. When they had healed from their operations, Yūsha' ﷺ assembled all men able to carry weapons and ranged them in battle order.

They set out on their march and soon they reached the Jordan valley which they could not cross on account of its depth and steepness. They were forced to halt and immediately his men began to grumble against Yūsha' ﷺ, saying, "If only Mūsā ﷺ were with us still, he would know how to lead us out of this impasse." Yūsha' ﷺ turned to them and spoke, "You must understand that I have not led you here of my own will but because my Lord has ordered me to do so. The forty years of roaming have now come to an end. Have you not noticed that for some days the heavenly provision of *manna* and *salwa* has ceased to rain from the skies? That is a sign that the exile has ended; I have been ordered to lead you into the promised land. So be patient and trust in Allah who has appointed me to be your prophet now that Mūsā ﷺ has gone." Then Yūsha' ﷺ prayed and waited for inspiration to come to him. It came to his heart that the Lord had parted the seas for Mūsā ﷺ, and all of the Banī Isrā'īl had passed through the waters safely. He was inspired to now lead his people through the waters of the Jordan in the same way. He went ahead and told his men to follow him. They were doubtful at first but when they saw that the waters parted for Yūsha' ﷺ they took heart and followed him. They all passed through dry-shod, and when they reached the plains of Jericho on the far side of the river they fell down and praised Allah Almighty. Some of the men claimed this was the first miracle of their prophet Yūsha' ﷺ, but others knew of another, earlier one. It had happened once that Yūsha' ﷺ had

passed into the land near Jericho with a band of scouts on the eve of the Sabbath, and they had encountered a group of hostile warriors. It was late in the day when they engaged in battle and they knew that if they could not achieve victory by sunset, the Sabbath would be upon them, making battle unlawful for them. At that time Yūsha' عليه السلام had prayed to the Lord to arrest the sun in its course in order to give them time to fight off the enemy before nightfall, and the Lord had granted his prayer. This had been the first miracle given to Yūsha' عليه السلام.

Of all the men who had been young when they left Egypt only Yūsha' عليه السلام survived and the husband of Mūsā's عليه السلام sister, Kilāf, who never strayed from the straight path. He became the righthand of Yūsha' عليه السلام and always fought close by his side. In due course, the Israelites took all the land that had been promised to them by Allah, from the Mediterranean Sea to the lands of Shām. They settled there and divided the land among the tribes of the twelve sons of Ya'qūb عليه السلام according to the command of the Lord. They encountered fierce resistance from the tribes of Kanaan who were a strong and war-like people. The Israelites were as yet inexperienced in the ways of war, having sojourned for so long in the uninhabited desert. But Yūsha' عليه السلام was a great leader and an able general and he knew neither fear nor hesitation. Under his command, they soon conquered all the small kingdoms of the area and set up a rule of peace. Jerusalem was taken after a siege that lasted six months, and all the idols in the city were dragged down and destroyed, while the conquered kings looked on in fear.

One day, it happened that their fortunes turned against them, and the Israelites lost on the battle field. Yūsha' عليه السلام at once understood that this must be a sign from Allah, that his men must be guilty of some misconduct or transgression. He assembled all his men in ranks and commanded them to renew their allegiance to him as their leader and prophet. He took the hand of each and every one of the soldiers, and in this way he found the man who had broken the law. His hand remained stuck to his own and he could not wrench it free. The soldier was questioned and he confessed to having taken some of the

booty to which by law he was not entitled and had hidden his loot secretly. He repented after his confession and thereafter, the Israelites were again victorious in battle.

Five of the enemy kings united to fight against Yūsha' عليه السلام and the Banī Isrā'īl. They knew that it was their custom to end a battle by nightfall and so they intended to detain them until it was dark and in that way gain victory over them. The day waned and still they were so engaged in battle that an interruption would have meant defeat. So Yūsha' عليه السلام prayed to the Lord as he had prayed before, "O Allah, give order to the sun who is under Your Command to stay his course, that he might not set until we have defeated the unbelievers. Thereafter, the name of this field shall be, 'the heavens rise', for the day was lengthened." The Lord heard his prayer and the sun was stopped just as it was about to set, not for one hour or two, but for a whole day. Night did not fall, but the full moon rose in spite of this, pale and white, in bright daylight. As it set again, the Banī Isrā'īl achieved victory and the battle was won. Now even the most stubborn doubter believed in the prophet Yūsha' عليه السلام. The men were ordered to fetch their families from the encampment at the Dead Sea and they settled in the land, living by the law that Mūsā عليه السلام had taught them.

Once more the Divine Command came to Yūsha' عليه السلام: he was ordered to purchase the field that had belonged to the prophet Ibrāhīm Khalīl al-Raḥmān عليه السلام at the town of Khalīl (Hebron), which was his gravesite and the burial-ground for many other prophets. There he was to bury the body of the prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام, which they had carried with them all the way from Egypt. In this way Yūsuf's عليه السلام last wish was fulfilled.

56 — THE STORY OF ZIMRI AND COZBI

THE TRIBES OF THE LAND of Kanaan were overcome by military might with Divine Aid, but they were yet plotting to destroy Israel from within. They began to invite people to the sacrifices of their gods and sought occasion to introduce the

men to the young girls so that they might be seduced. The soldiers of the Israelites were very much taken by the beauty of the women of Kanaan and would soon have forgotten their commandments and abandoned themselves to worldly pleasures. One of the tribal chieftains, Zūr, had a very beautiful daughter by the name of Cozbi. He perceived a chance of destroying the Israelites and one day he called his daughter to him and said to her, "O my daughter Cozbi, you have witnessed what all the sons of Israel have done to our land. Do you wish to see them destroy our cities as well and lead us off into slavery?" Cozbi replied at once, "Who could wish for such a thing, father?" "Will you then do as I tell you, Cozbi, for you have the means of saving your people." "But what can I possibly do, father, I am only a frail woman?" "If only you were willing, you could be the undoing of 100,000 men." "May my soul be ransomed for you, father," she said, "I am ready to do anything you say." "Your soul has nothing to do with this. Do you not know that your beauty is the subject of many a song and ballads are sung about your charms? How many princes have asked for your hand in marriage and I have refused them all, holding out for the best bargain. At last this day has come." "O father, help me to understand your speech," said Cozbi. Zūr then said, "You must know that among the sons of Israel it is counted as a crime to consort with other than one's own wedded partner and it is forbidden for them to take foreign women as their wives. Anyone found guilty receives the death penalty at once." "What a strange thing. Why does their god mix into the affairs of the heart?" "That I cannot say, but I do know that it is our only chance against them. We must try to corrupt their morality. That way we can divide them against each other and incite them to oppose to their prophet and leader, Yūsha'. It has come to my knowledge that one of their officers, a certain Zimri, the son of Salu, is greatly enthralled by the beauty of women. If he were seduced to transgress the law, all his men would follow his example and rebellion would break out in their ranks. In that way the power of Yūsha' over them would be broken, and for us that would be a good thing." "Now finally I have under-

stood, father. Leave the rest to me. I will complete the task to your satisfaction."

She went off to prepare herself. Then she descended into the marketplace which was frequented by the soldiers of the Israelites, holding a basket in which she displayed her goods. She spoke to no-one until she had found the man she was sent to look for, Zimri the son of Salu. Him she approached and, offering him her wares, cast upon him a ravishing glance which no man could withstand. So it went with Zimri the son of Salu, all reason left him, and maddened by desire for the girl, he half pushed, half dragged her off to his tent. When his men saw that their leader had taken it upon himself to disobey, they followed his example and went ahead and took foreign women as well.

Word soon spread and came to Yūsha' ﷺ. Yūsha' ﷺ hoped to stop the evil ways from spreading and called Zimri to him. He came, accompanied by his mistress, and he spoke to the prophet in a mocking and disrespectful tone. "You know that you are doing what is forbidden and you know also what punishment this carries, O Zimri. You are a bad example to your men. The Wrath of Allah is not far off." "Now that we have finally reached and settled in the promised land, Allah is not concerned with us anymore," retorted Zimri. "You are still young, Zimri. You do not know what Allah's Wrath brought upon your fathers in the days of old. Repent now and turn away from evil, lest you draw Divine Anger upon yourself and your people." But Zimri had eyes and ears for none but the woman whom he adored, and paid no heed to the prophet's words.

People saw him leaving the tent of Yūsha' ﷺ unharmed and they took it for a sign of permission. They all went and followed his example. Before a month had passed the whole tribe of Zimri who lived in the border region of Kanaan took up leading a dissolute life. They engaged in immoral activities with such a frenzy as though they had been deprived of a vital necessity.

The Wrath of Allah was not long in coming. Soon an epidemic broke out among them that slew no less than 70,000 of their number. The survivors of that plague understood that it had come as punishment for their betrayal and came running

repentant to the prophet Yūsha'ﷺ, crying to him to save them. "How should I save you! You have brought this plague upon yourselves by your godlessness. I can advise you only to carry out judgment against the transgressors amongst you." This none of the people dared to do and they answered half-heartedly, "You are a prophet, the *sharī'a* is in your hands. If you will not apply it, who will?"

So the plague continued to rage among them. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, son of Hārūn ﷺ was sent up north to report on the conditions in the land and he was a man of courage and of strong faith. When he saw the effects of the general immorality and the plague that it had caused, he set his mind to extinguishing its root. With spear in hand he went unaided to the tent of Zimri and his mistress and killed them both with one thrust. Then he brought out both bodies from the tent, impaled on his lance and showed them to the people. "This is how we punish immorality according to the Law," he said, "for the sake of the Almighty Lord." Whereupon, the soldiers went out and put to death all those indulging in forbidden pleasures and Allah Almighty took from them the dreadful disease which had visited them. Again all the people of Israel renewed their oath. They promised not to turn from the path of righteousness and to observe the Law of Mūsāﷺ.

57 — THE STORY OF BAL'AM

THE CONQUESTS OF YŪSHA' ﷺ proceeded northwards, until the armies of the Israelites had come close to the borders of Shām. Yūsha'ﷺ sent out scouts who brought back reports that there were only minor kingdoms in that area whose kings were struck with fear of the invaders and had no intention of allying their forces. They also brought back word of a certain Bal'am the son of Be'or, who lived in that land and had great influence over the regional chiefs.

This news came as a surprise to all of Israel, for Bal'am was born of the sons of Israel and had left Egypt with them. Be-

sides Yūsha' عليه السلام and Kilāf, he was the third survivor of that generation. He had been a man of great learning, for Mūsā عليه السلام had taught him and he was one of those whose prayers were answered by the Lord. Later something within him had become twisted and he had rebelled against Mūsā عليه السلام, along with Qārūn, who had promised him a great reward if he would utter a curse against the prophet. But the Lord Almighty did not leave him to speak his imprecation and his tongue curled up in his mouth and he was thus maimed. In the course of events he left the tribes and went off alone, settling at last in the lands of Shām among the unbelievers. There he was greatly respected for his wisdom and learning, and for that his supplications were always answered, even though he had gone so far astray and his tongue remained twisted. None of the Israelites could understand how this could be, but Yūsha' عليه السلام, after hearing the reports, said to them, "The wisdom of the Lord is inscrutable. Do not trouble yourselves about this Bal'am. If his prayers are acceptable to the Divine Presence to this very day, there must be a hidden reason for it. Allah never accepts a prayer uttered against a believer: See what happened to Bal'am when he tried to curse the prophet Mūsā عليه السلام. We do not know what the Lord holds in store for him yet." The messenger had also reported that Bal'am lived alone and had not married, for the women of the land despised him on account of his short stature. Bal'am lived alone with his donkey as if she were his wife. The words of their prophet gave the Muslims courage, and they prepared to march out against the enemy.

In a village in the land of Shām an old, wizened man was sitting by a brook while his donkey stood nearby. Whenever the donkey looked towards the man, her eyes became red and bloodshot with anger and hatred. The man rose and looked towards the mountains, straining to see, as if expecting somebody to come from that direction. But try as he might, he could make out nothing. This man was Bal'am, the son of Be'or. He had heard of the victories of Yūsha' عليه السلام and the advance of the armies of the Israelites, and he had grown restless and fearful. He remembered all that had befallen aforetime and he now

was filled with regret. He would have gone forth to meet Yūsha' عليه السلام and beg forgiveness, but he had not the courage to do so. He had considered fleeing even further north and settling in an unknown land, but he was old now and felt uneasy about moving to a strange place where no-one knew of him and of his special gifts. So he just stayed on and waited.

Several times he had been on the verge of a decision and had called to his donkey to make ready to go, but the beast had only looked up at him with her blood-tinged, hateful eyes. The Lord had given to her the power of speech. On certain occasions she spoke out spitefully against her master. Bal'am, of course, was stupefied to hear his donkey speak to him and he began to tremble. The donkey made use of his confusion and landed a kick on his backside so that Bal'am tumbled over. While he was yet picking himself up, he heard the sound of footsteps approaching. Looking, he saw a crowd of people, notables and envoys from the Lords of Shām who greeted Bal'am with reverence and signs of great respect. They bore valuable gifts and honoured him in every way. The kings of Shām were expecting an attack by the Israelites and knowing themselves to be too weak to withstand their forces, they had come to Bal'am to ask him to bless them and to curse the armies of Yūsha' عليه السلام, for whomever Bal'am cursed, was cursed, and whomever he blessed was blessed.

Now they approached Bal'am with sweet words, voicing their request: "O Bal'am, surely you have heard that Yūsha', who shows his enemies no mercy, has taken up position behind yonder mountain and we are now going out to face him in battle." "Yes, indeed I have heard," replied Bal'am. "Nobody can survive the onslaught of his armies," they continued, "he has destroyed all our neighbours, the Amalakites, the Kanaanites, the Amorites and the Madyanites. All of them fell before him and were vanquished. How then shall we stand against him and hope to fight a victorious battle?" "I know all this and I am not interested," said Bal'am. "Is it not true," they said, "that once, long ago, you uttered a curse against their prophet Mūsā عليه السلام? Surely they have not forgotten this. You are guilty in their eyes

and if they find you here and discover your identify, you will be the first to die. It is in your own interest to help us win against them this day." "Help? How should I help you? I am old and withered. I will barely be able to save myself." "You can help us indeed. You must go out onto the battlefield ahead of our army and facing them, you must curse them in the name of their god, for anyone whom you curse is cursed. That way we will be able to overpower them." Bal'am trembled in the depths of his being and said, "No, that I cannot do. I can and may not speak a curse against them," for he felt sincere remorse at what he had done before, and the oldest allegiance in his heart began to stir.

But the envoys had expected something of this kind, and they winked at each other, signalling that they would try another tack. They began, "O Bal'am, you are an old man now and your life has not been easy. Are you content then to live out the rest of your days in hardship and poverty? We could easily change these conditions for you, if you were only willing." Bal'am broke out into shameless laughter and said, "When I mount upon this donkey, it is as if I have mounted upon the whole of mankind, for I am of the sons of Israel and all of mankind is condemned to bear my burden. Do not trouble yourselves, I will look after myself and pursue my own kind of pleasure. Allah answers the prayers of a person like me, but He does not give me power. That is why I am angry at heart and full of bitterness. Do not let yourself be fooled by the lies of Israel, in the future they will all be like me, and they will make the nations spit blood!"

One of the envoys tried to appease Bal'am and began to speak to him softly, "Bal'am, leave off your idle dreams and unwholesome cravings and live a real life at last. If you help us just this one time, we will set you up in a comfortable villa, surrounded by green parks and gardens, replete with sparkling fountains and a host of slaves to see to your needs. There will be beautiful maidens for you and wine flowing in streams. This sordid life with your donkey will be over for good." Bal'am looked up and sneered, "Your women have always held me in contempt," he said, "because I am shorter than they." "We

have thought of a solution for that as well," the man smiled and said, "the girls we will provide for you will be no older than ten years of age. If you stretch yourself a little bit you should be well able to reach to them." Now, Bal'am could not entirely reject this offer off-hand. It did appeal to him in a secret corner of his dark heart and he began to soften. He made them swear a solemn oath that they would keep their promise if he agreed to help them as they wished. It was their custom, on swearing an oath, that each man would pierce his thumb and squeeze out a drop of blood into a vessel. Their blood was then mixed and they would each lick it up in turn. In this way their oath was sealed. Bal'am participated in this ceremony, thus promising to do their bidding.

The envoys then departed, reminding Bal'am to be at the appointed place of the meeting of the armies the very next morning. Bal'am set out promptly with his donkey, already dreaming of the luxurious life promised to him after his accomplished feat. But he began to have trouble with his donkey. It ran off ahead of him and he could barely catch up with it. He tried to mount it but it would not stop for him to do so. When, finally, he succeeded, the donkey ran on at a great pace, until suddenly its feet sank into the ground as if it had stumbled into a bog. It fell and could raise itself only with difficulty. By now it was late in the afternoon and Bal'am had not covered even a tenth of the distance. He realised that even, if he were to ride hard all night long, he would scarcely reach the battleground by the morning. He addressed his donkey and asked her, "You know a lot of things, O my little donkey, tell me what to do now?" Unexpectedly, his donkey spoke to him, speaking harsh words, "O you arch-misguided one, just look at yourself! Has the punishment of the Lord not been enough for you that He made your tongue hang outside your mouth for that you attempted to curse His holy prophet! Now you have set out to do the same thing once more. What do you think will happen to you this time? Do you think the Lord will reward you? Many years ago you fled here to live among the idolaters and you took me into your service. I have served your every purpose, even standing in as a wife! You

can hardly be said to be a human being, you must be the lowest of all despicable creatures! Yet in spite of all your misdeeds, the Lord is infinitely great and merciful, and no matter what a man has done, if only he seriously repents and turns back from sin, he will find forgiveness. O Bal'am, repent! Return to your Lord, He will forgive you and place your tongue back in your mouth and stop all your drooling and slavering! How can you trust in the promises of the godless? Who could drive a single nail into a piece of wood if it be not His Will? Even Qārūn with all his knowledge and wealth and multitude of slaves was powerless against the Might of the Lord. The earth swallowed him — that was his end which hitherto you have not known."

Bal'am heard but he did not believe. He could not believe he was hearing his donkey speak. He thought he was listening to his own thoughts and imaginations and misgivings. He began to scream out loud to enhance his courage. "Oh yes, I will press on and be on time for the meeting of the armies, and then I will hurl my curse against the Banī Isrā'īl and they will be defeated. And then I will retire into my palace and my harem of delightful ten-year olds! O my donkey, then I will divorce myself from you!"

Such was his frivolous speech. But the donkey spoke again and tried to shake him into consciousness, "Bal'am, did you not see how I stumbled and fell a little while ago? And do you not see how I can scarcely walk ahead even now. One step ahead and two steps back?" Bal'am replied, "Yes, come to think of it, I have noticed; what are you doing that for?" The donkey said, "It is because I can perceive the angels whom you cannot see. They are all around, preventing me from stepping ahead. They are trying to prevent you from reaching the mountain before daybreak." But Bal'am was too far gone into his dream for these warning words to reach him and he remained unimpressed. He was now possessed by a strange form of pride and ambition. He yelled with all the air in his lungs, "I will proceed to curse them. Who could stop me!" The donkey then said, "Woe to thee! The angels have now withdrawn from the path; it is now cleared to lead you towards your doom, for you will

meet your just deserts. I can carry you ahead now at the speed which you desire, but know that you are hastening towards your punishment ..." All along the way the donkey reminded Bal'am of the events that had taken place before this time, and how the Wrath of Allah had destroyed the unbelievers and transgressors, hoping that he would yet change his mind before they reached the mountain.

By the early morning, they had arrived. The two armies were arrayed against each other and were about to sound the charge. Bal'am dismounted from his donkey, enveloped in his dreams of palaces and young virgins. The commanders of the idolaters applauded his coming with triumphant cries and a great clamour, while Yūsha' ﷺ regarded this lost son of his people with a sorrowful heart. Bal'am's pride was swelled by the applause afforded to him and he marched on, his head held high. He climbed to the top of a boulder in order to appear taller and then he began to speak. He spoke for a long time, singing his own praises. At last he raised his hands towards heaven, ready to speak the words of imprecation which he had prepared so well for that day, "O Lord, make Yūsha' and his armies perish on this day!" But try as he might, these words would simply not come out of his mouth; instead he ended up voicing the opposite of what he had intended to say, damning the unbelievers and praying for the victory of Yūsha'. After he had finished speaking, his tongue which he had been incapable of withdrawing into his mouth since the time he had cursed Mūsā ﷺ, now became so swollen and distended that it swung pendulously down to his navel. Bal'am could speak no more, he only made unintelligible sounds in his throat. He slid down from the rock he had so proudly climbed like a beaten dog with his tail between his legs and crawled over to the side of Yūsha' ﷺ. He no longer had the means of expressing himself in human terms, but Yūsha' ﷺ had understood all he needed to know. Upon a sign from him, the charge was sounded and the battle raged. The enemy was easily beaten and put to flight, their morale having been badly shaken by the these events. The outcome of the battle was that all the kingdoms of the region passed into

the hands of Yūsha' ﷺ and he pacified all the land up to the foot of the Toros mountain range.

Some months passed. One day, Bal'am was brought before Yūsha' ﷺ. They told him that Bal'am only howled and grovelled like a dog at their feet, and they had come to Yūsha' ﷺ expecting him to order the execution of this creature. But Yūsha' ﷺ thought otherwise, "Leave him as he is," he said to them, "so that people might behold him and take a lesson from his subhuman condition. He is an example for all of Israel. Allah Almighty had given him great knowledge and had he remained steadfast on the way, what heights and exalted stations might he have attained! But he chose instead to follow the way of Shayṭān, the Accursed, and became obsessed by the love of worldly possessions. As a result everything was taken from him, all his rewards have gone, and who knows for how long he is destined to crawl across the face of the earth in this degraded fashion! Truly, it is a thing to be feared!" Some of the people of Yūsha' ﷺ wished to know more. "What then, should we learn from his example, what does it mean for us?" they asked. "Have you still not understood? Allah Almighty teaches you thereby to hold fast to the Holy Torah and the knowledge conveyed to you through His prophet Mūsā ﷺ, so that you might live in peace in the promised land. But if you let yourselves be seduced by greed and lust for worldliness, surely you will he driven out into exile and degraded, as has happened to this unfortunate Bal'am. Perhaps your tongue will not be made to hang down to your navel, but punishment is sure to reach you, and only He Almighty knows what He has written for you. If you let Shayṭān dominate you, he will strip you of the honour that has been given to the sons of Ādam, he will twist your minds and make you do as Bal'am did to his donkey." "May Allah protect us!" they cried out. "Yes, may Allah protect us all and preserve our reason. He will not let this happen to you as long as you walk in His way. But how many prophets have come and gone, always with the same message of truth to mankind? After my time, how many more are yet to come I do not know, yet man has always forgotten, again and again. One day the last

prophet of all will appear, as it is written in the Torah, and he will bring a revelation for all peoples on earth. He will be the final messenger. After him there will be no new revelation until the end of time. This has been revealed to you, so teach your children, your sons and grandsons, to believe in him and to honour his name until the time he appears. Let them adhere to the Scriptures and abide by the Law and all their works will be made easy for them. If you do not follow these injunctions, you will be crushed under a mountain load of sin, and you will have to bear that burden in this world and the next and you will not be forgiven."

As Yūsha' ﷺ spoke these words to the Israelites, tears welled up in his eyes and his voice became rough with sorrow. His followers asked him, "O Yūsha', what causes you to grieve? Is it that you are seeing visions of the future and is it as terrible as the lot of Bal'am?" To this Yūsha' ﷺ gave no reply and said only, "Set him free!" They let Bal'am go and he took a few steps away from them, then turned and crept back. Thus he turned round and round in indecision, for in truth he had no place to go. At that moment, he heard an ass braying in the distance and he made his way towards it. When he reached the ass, he lay on his stomach and began munching the grass as he saw the donkey doing. Again Yūsha' ﷺ addressed the men, saying, "Pay heed to my words. Do not ever adopt the ways of the beasts. You are born as sons of Ādam ﷺ. Perhaps they may appeal to you at times and you might think you have gained a benefit, but in the end you will find yourself abased and degraded like Bal'am. I haven't the authority to slay him and put him out of his misery, that is in the hands of the Lord. Each man has his own mind and conscience and every human being is born into this world as a Muslim. His upbringing and environment leads him astray. See what has happened to Bal'am the son of Be'or. Be wary of the way you tread. I do not know how long Bal'am will yet have to live in this fashion, but his life is not ours to take. Every remaining day of his life is a punishment for him. After him there will come many more Bal'ams, but I pray that they might not be from your descendants, O sons of Israel, that

men may not look on you with contempt and loathing, crawling through the dust on all fours like the lowly beasts." Yūsha' ﷺ was farsighted and provident, and he tried to warn the Banī Isrā'īl of what he foresaw of the future.

This story is also mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān in these verses:

"*And recite to them the tiding of him to whom We gave Our signs, but he cast them off and Satan followed after him, and he became one of the perverts. And had We willed, We would have raised him up thereby; but he inclined towards the earth and followed his lust. So the likeness of him is as the likeness of a dog; if thou attackest, it lolls its tongue out or if thou leaves, it lolls its tongue out. That is that people's likeness who cried lies to Our signs. So relate the story; haply they will reflect. An evil likeness is the likeness of the people who cried lies to Our signs and themselves were wrongful. Whomsoever Allah guides, he is rightly guided and whom He leads astray, they are the losers. We have created for Jahannam many jinn and men. They have hearts, but understand not with them. They have eyes, but perceive not with them. They have ears, but they hear not with them. They are like cattle; nay, rather they are further astray. Those — they are the heedless.*" [The Battlements, 7:175–179]

58 — FURTHER EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF YŪSHA', AND HIS DEATH

THE LAND that the Israelites had conquered was divided into twelve provinces. Each of the twelve tribes dwelt in their own land and each tribe had its own leader. The Torah was taught and learnt and the people prospered and multiplied and could not have wished for a better life. The prophet Yūsha' ﷺ lived apart from the people on his own, but he was informed of all that went on in the land.

There was however, one point which worried him. The Israelites had destroyed and torn down all the temples of pagan worship, but they were very reluctant to teach the unbelievers about the one, true God, Allah. They began to ill-treat the people they had conquered and made them work hard and

suffer cruelty, as if they sought to avenge themselves on them for what their fathers had suffered at the hands of the Egyptians. Although it was forbidden to them, they took to drink and gambling and used their God-given ingenuity to devise what was forbidden. They learned how to make liquor out of every fruit and tree and they invented games and gambling bits of carved wood and polished stone. Yūsha' ﷺ saw that it was the beginning of no good and he called the leaders of these games and diversions and counselled them to steer clear of these transgressions. He was more than amazed at the strange answer they came up with in their own defence. "O Yūsha'," they explained, "we know full well the harm contained in these things. But you see, we are not producing them for our own people but for those we have conquered. For, if we do not keep their minds occupied with such distractions they will awaken to opposition and cause us much trouble. We are poisoning them in order to keep our own people free to lead a clean and god-fearing life."

When he heard their twisted reasoning, Yūsha' ﷺ grew very angry and turned on them, "O sons of Israel, this is not righteous conduct, nor one befitting a people from which have sprung such a number of blessed prophets. No man was created for evil, and people's purpose on earth is an evil one! Is not the All-Merciful God the Creator of all men, believers and unbelievers? Be careful, lest those weapons your guile has devised be turned against you and you become your own victims! Should you not be teaching the people you have conquered with the help of the Almighty His Holy Name, instead of trying to perpetuate their corruption and misguidedness?" Again they gave Yūsha' ﷺ a strange answer, "What do they have to do with our God? He is the God of Israel, and they have no part in that." "Be quiet," cried Yūsha' ﷺ, "you are committing sacrilege. Have you already forgotten the forty years in the desert? Do you think you are safe from punishment for your iniquity? No, Allah may strike you again at any time if you adhere not to the path of righteousness." They said, "You, Yūsha' ﷺ, because you are a descendent of Yūsuf ﷺ, still hold against us what our forefathers, Yūsuf's brothers, did to him! You bear a person-

al grudge, that is all. Or else, you have not yet forgotten the time we accused you falsely of having murdered Mūsā عليه السلام." "I have forgotten and forgiven," said Yūsha' عليه السلام, "Allah Almighty showed all of Israel the truth in their dreams at night — was that not vindication enough?" But the men of Israel were possessed by pride and their bad characteristics took hold of then. The pride of race was strong and they would not marry from among the conquered people they dwelt amongst, to keep their bloodline pure. All extramarital relations were forbidden and punishable by death. But they cheated anyway and took the children born to them out of wedlock and raised them in their families.

Their enemies were now largely subdued and the tribes turned and began to look at each other with envy. Rivalry and hatred broke out between members of different tribes. They often came to Yūsha' عليه السلام to complain that a certain party possessed more, or was living in better conditions than they were. But Yūsha' عليه السلام told them again and again that the land had been divided up already by Mūsā عليه السلام by Divine Command and that justice had been done by everyone and none was preferred above the other. For a while, this placated them, but Yūsha' عليه السلام could see that they would soon go for each other's throats at the very first opportunity. Yūsha' عليه السلام tried to explain these dangers to the Israelites, but he discovered they were no longer content with being tribal chiefs, they wished to be feudal lords and kings. The disease of worldliness was spreading rapidly among them.

Yūsha' عليه السلام was by then nearly 110 years old but he was still vigorous and strong. He often retired to the Ephraim Mountains and climbed their high peaks to be alone with his Lord. From the highest peak he could see all the way from the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea to Lake Tiberias in the north. In those days, nearly 3,000 years ago, all the land was green and verdant and soothing to the eye. There, in solitude, Yūsha' عليه السلام took account of his life and tried to recognize his errors. He prayed and fasted and asked the Lord for forgiveness.

One morning, he got up early and went to his favourite spot on the mountain. When he arrived at the summit, he suddenly heard a voice. At first Yūsha' عليه السلام thought it must be a shep-

herd, but soon he realised he was wrong. It was an old man approaching who was talking to himself as he wandered, speaking of his innermost thoughts and feelings. Yūsha' ﷺ listened to him, half-amused, half-curious. The man spoke thus, "Why all this wandering towards an uncertain goal? What a foolish bird that leaves its nest! I left behind me a paradise — will I ever find any way back to it? Will my old feet carry me over all that distance back to my home? Ah, surely before I reach it, the rocks will have rolled over me and buried me beneath them ..." He then paused and looked wistfully all around him, then he continued, "Ah, how much this land resembles my own homeland! How ungrateful I was to leave it behind and wander away. Never again will I catch sight of it, I feel, and yet — how much this land resembles my own. The blue waters of one sea and the green waters of the other. It is like a smaller version of my own country! Oh, that I could spend my last years in a country like this ..." At this point, Yūsha' ﷺ interrupted him and called out, "Good morning, stranger, and may your morning be a good one!" The man was startled, surprised when he had fancied himself all alone, and made as if to flee. "So there is no peace for me even here," he muttered under his breath. But Yūsha' ﷺ persuaded him to stay a little while and to tell him more about his beloved homeland as he had heard him talking to himself. The man asked him, "Does this mountain belong to you?" Yūsha' ﷺ replied, "How can anything on earth belong to us? Everything is from Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. In truth, all belongs to Him alone and to Him is our return." Now the stranger was interested to know more about Yūsha' ﷺ, and Yūsha' ﷺ spoke to him, told him his whole story and the fates of the Banī Isrā'īl. He spoke for a long time. Then they sat down to share bread and water. Thereafter, they still did not part company but stayed together for some days, for they felt sympathy and kinship for each other. The stranger understood the truth of the message of Yūsha' ﷺ and accepted the faith in the Divine Unity of Allah Almighty.

One day, Yūsha' ﷺ asked the stranger to finally tell him about his homeland which he had been musing about the first

day they met. "You mentioned that this land is similar to the one you have left. How is that? Explain it to me." The man thought for a while. Then he said, "Is not that river we see flowing in the valley below, the Jordan River? And to the north we see the Lake Tiberias, while to the south there is the Dead Sea, both bodies of water connected by the Jordan, is it not so? So we can regard the Jordan River as a straight between two seas. My country about which you have asked me lies to the northeast of the Toros Mountains. You must cross the mountain range and turn towards the northeast. Then you will cross a great many mountains, plains and rivers and one day you will reach my country. It is just like what we see before us here, except that it is much greater, wider and the water much deeper. There, on the south end lies my mountain, and I was brought up to call it 'Dev Mountain'. Life was peaceful there and untroubled and my people were good and kind and lived as brothers with one another. Yet something possessed me and forced me to wander, I tore myself loose and began to travel, as a rock that tumbles from its bed and keeps on rolling ..." Yūsha' عليه السلام listened carefully to his description then he sighed and said, "Truly a paradisiacal place where there is no strife and contention between people. How could you ever leave it?" "O my friend. I was young and I let myself be distracted by the desires and restlessness of my youth. If only you knew what I found at the foot of the mountain — a venomous breed of people, a veritable nest of snakes and scorpions. From their evil I have been fleeing ever since. When I met you, I had resolved to return to my home at last, that God-willing I might die there. Having met you and learned all you taught me, my life's wanderings now make sense to me and I would return home a fulfilled man ..." "Then depart now, and peace be with you," said Yūsha' عليه السلام, "I would fain accompany you, but as I am a prophet I can take not a step without my Lord's permission and He has commanded me to stay here with my own people." The stranger understood but his heart was heavy at the parting. At last he rose and picking up his staff, he saluted Yūsha' عليه السلام one last time and turned towards the northeast. The heart of Yūsha' عليه السلام was

sore at the parting, for again he was left alone without a companion and he knew this was to be his fate. Now, the land the stranger had described to Yūsha' ﷺ was the Bosphorus which connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara, where the city of Istanbul is now located. The mountain he came from lies on the eastern shore, the Anatolian side, close to the entrance into the Black Sea.

Two more years passed, and again it was spring on the plains of Jericho. Yūsha' ﷺ had been a prophet to his people for twenty-eight years. As he sat once more on his favourite spot on the Ephraim Mountains and delved into his memories, suddenly he was overcome by a longing to know what had become of the stranger he had met so briefly and who had nevertheless become his friend. He also sensed with certainty that his time in the world was drawing to an end. He descended from the mountain peak to take leave of his people and to counsel them one last time. Conditions in the plains had deteriorated as the Israelites had readily adopted the unholy ways of the people they had conquered. Idols were being set up again, slave-markets sprang up and the men fought each other over the possession of the youngest and most beautiful slave-girls. The conquered Amorites and Amalakites spread the word that soon their idols would begin to multiply and take up their reign anew. They said to the Banī Isrā'īl, "What good is this practice of yours of paying *zakāt*? You work for your earnings and someone else enjoys the profits? Surely this cannot be justice! Listen to us: until the idols resume their reign, better hide away your earnings and make them appear minimal. That way you won't be obliged to pay the poor-tax!" The Israelites listened and gladly took that advice, for it hit them in their sorest spot.

Yūsha' ﷺ descended from the mountain and stayed among his people for some days, gathering about him all the priests and leaders. He admonished them one final time to obey Allah and His Commands and to worship none but Him alone. He reminded them of history and the tribulations of his people. He warned them against adopting the customs of the idolaters and of doubting the truth that had been revealed to Mūsā ﷺ and to

the prophets who went before him. The Israelites were moved and wept and promised to follow and to hold fast to the Torah. Yūsha' ﷺ said to them, "O my people, I have grown very old amongst you and perhaps this is my last address to you. I have seen you weep before this and make promises which you haven't kept. Your state is not favourable, you have come to a crossroads now. One road is the path of righteousness and light, the other is that of wrong-doing and sinfulness. There are those among you who work at both your inward and outward destruction. Step on your ego while it is still weak and small, let it not grow into a monster which you can no longer control. Do not look down on people with contempt: Allah has created all men to be free, and they should live and die in freedom. Before the Lord all men are equal; wealth does not confer rank upon man, but his deeds do. Do not oppress others, treat them as your brothers, and remember the times when you were oppressed and enslaved. Be not a stiff-necked people for if you persist in stubbornness you will be made to bear a yoke, like the oxen who plough the fields. I have spoken to you many times and I say it again, for my duty as a prophet commands me to do so, even if it displeases you. This is Allah's word to you. After me, many prophets are yet to come. They will teach men about the Unity of Allah and the religion of Islam. According to mankind's degree of maturity, the Law revealed to them will be perfected also. The final prophet whose name is Ahmad will bring the last revelation, a book containing the most perfect law and answers to all questions. This book will be valid on earth until the end of time. The coming of this prophet has been revealed in the Torah which Mūsā ﷺ has brought to us. It is our duty to teach our children and our children's children to expect his advent and to believe in him when he appears. I now testify to my belief in the prophet of the last times. Do you the same. Prepare your sons to be ready for him and to join forces with him."

After this address Yūsha' ﷺ retired again into his place of seclusion and was not seen again by his people. He died that same year. When the tribes of Israel learnt of his death, they buried him at his favourite mountain retreat in the Ephraim

Mountains, on the summit of the mountain of Timah-Sarah, may his soul rest in peace.

Since then, nearly 3,000 years have passed. On the eastern shore of the Bosphorus near the entrance to the Black Sea there is a hill which is called Mount Yūsha'. Opposite it, across the straits there lies another hill called 'Telli Baba'. These two hills are considered to be burial places of patron saints who are regarded as the guardians of the gates of the Dār al-Islām, of the Homeland of Islam. But who are they? Telli Baba is supposed to have been a soldier in the army of Mehmet the Conqueror who was slain while drawing his bowstring, (in Turkish tel means string or wire). But how did the name 'Mount Yūsha'' originate? Could it possibly refer to the prophet Yūsha' عليه السلام? Or is there another saint of the same name? There are various accounts concerning this. Of old the hill was called 'Dev Mountain'. On its summit there are traces of a grave, seventeen meters in length and four metres in width. This is said to be the grave of Yūsha' عليه السلام who died fighting on the hilltop. The dimensions of the tomb are not realistic, they are symbolically referring to the man's spiritual rank. The hilltop is crowned with beautiful, age-old poplar trees.

Historical record is quite clear: his conquests took the prophet Yūsha' عليه السلام only as far as Shām and the foothills of the Toros Mountains, he never came as far as Istanbul. In order to reach the Bosphorus he would have had to fight the Hittites in Anatolia, and this certainly did not take place.

But spiritual history suggests another possibility. After the death of their prophet Yūsha' عليه السلام, the Israelites fell into ever greater corruption, disobeying the Law of the Torah and reverting to idol-worship. They slew their prophets and imprisoned their priests and again and again betrayed the trust that had been given them. The soul of Yūsha' عليه السلام felt remorse at having chosen this spot on the mountains of Ephraim as his burial site, from where he had to witness the undoing of his people. His soul also saw into the future and perceived the coming of bloodshed and iniquity in the Holy Land. He foresaw his people's denial of the Last Prophet, whose coming he had foretold.

The soul of Yūsha' felt disgust at all this ungodliness and he prayed to the Almighty to remove his resting place from the lands in which such an unholy people dwelt. The place of his choice was one which resembled his original burial ground, as had been described to him by the stranger whose name he never knew, the man who had spoken to Yūsha' ﷺ about the Dev Mountain. Perhaps Allah Almighty heard his prayer and granted Yūsha' ﷺ that site as his spiritual resting place, his *maqām*. Another curious fact is this: the grave at first faced Jerusalem, but after the conquest of Mecca and the cleansing of the Kaaba of the idols it turned in the direction of Mecca.

May Allah grant his soul eternal peace. Amīn.

59 – ṢAMŪ'ĪL
THE LOSS OF THE ARK

AFTER YŪSHA' ﷺ HAD PASSED AWAY, the Lord did not send another prophet to the Israelites for over eighty years. During this period they fell away from the Law of the Torah and forgot their prophets' teachings. For this, they were punished by the Lord at the hands of the unbelievers who raided their flocks and their fields, plundered their houses and villages and led their children off into captivity. The Israelites suffered much at their hands and became despondent, living in fear of their enemies. They were unable to choose a king and leader from among themselves, for each tribe vied for the kingship and there was no unity among them. They deplored their fate and prayed to the Lord to send them guidance.

Their greatest enemies were the giant tribe of the Amalakites and their kings, the Jālūt (Goliath; as the kings of Egypt were called Pharaoh, and the kings of the Babylonians Nimrod, so the kings of the Amalakites were called Jālūt). The largest tribe of Israel was the tribe of Yehūda. They were the keepers of the Ark of the Covenant. Whenever they went to war they carried the Ark ahead of them and it gave the soldiers strength and courage. As to what was contained in this Ark, Allah only

knows. Some say it contained the broken shards of the tablets Mūsā ﷺ had brought down from the mountain, which he had smashed in his anger at seeing his people worshipping the golden calf. The holy words had flown from the tablets but the shards remained. Others relate that it contained the staffs of Mūsā ﷺ and his brother Hārūn ﷺ, or their sandals and their cloaks. Some say that it held the heavenly foods, *manna* and *salwa* or some fragments of the stone of Mūsā ﷺ upon which he had laid his clothes. Yet others maintain that the Ark was completely empty, that it was filled only with the breath of the holy spirit of the Torah, which gave to it its power. Allah knows best.

One day the tribesmen of Yehūda learnt that the Amalakites were planning a major attack on them and they sent out word to their brother tribes to assemble their forces and to help them against their enemy. But none of the tribes were willing to stand by their brothers and they said, "The holy Ark is with you. You can rely on its strength and protection. We have barely the strength to fend for ourselves." The men of Yehūda were very disappointed at their brothers' refusal to come to their aid and they said, "Oh, if among a hundred of our number there were only one man of true courages!" by which they meant to say, "one man of perfect faith." For when a man has faith he feels no fear in the face of death. Jālūt also learnt of the tribes' refusal to help Yehūda and he came out in great force to the battle. Yehūda was outnumbered and surrounded in battle and defeated. The men fled and the Ark fell into the hands of the enemy. They carried off this valuable trophy to their king Jālūt, and he ordered that it be set up in their temple among the other idols, for they said, "We have captured the god of the Israelites," and they rejoiced.

When they went the next day to the temple they saw that their chief idol had toppled down and that the captured Ark was standing on top of it. Jālūt ordered that the Ark be nailed to the ground and the other idols be set on top of it. This was done, but again, when they went in the next morning they found the Ark on top and the idols broken to bits on the ground. They began to worry and removed the Ark from

the temple and stored it in other places, but whatever they did with it, it brought them harm. Either their crops withered or their animals died. A slave-girl who was an Israelite told them, "This Ark will bring you only misfortune as long as you keep it with you. You must return it to its owners." But this they were unwilling to do, knowing that possession of the Ark gave strength and blessing to their enemies. So they kept it and the drought and death among their flocks continued. Finally, they banned it to a remote village and left it there with the unwitting inhabitants. These, however, soon became aware of the fact that any person who as much as looked at the Ark would fall ill and break out in boils. Jālūt was told of the outbreak of a plague, and people appealed to him to free them of the 'cursed' thing he had placed in their midst. Jālūt promised a handsome reward to any person able to solve the problem. The Israelite slave-girl spoke up and said, "I have told you before there is no other solution than that you return the Ark to its rightful owners. Nothing else will lift this bane." Jālūt himself went to the stricken village and as soon as he set eyes upon the Ark, he too fell ill. Then he was convinced and asked the girl how best they could rid themselves of the Ark. "Place it upon an ox-cart and send the animals off towards Yehūda." The oxen will return after a day or two, and you will know then that the Ark has been removed," she said. This they did and the oxen set out straight for the east. By the wisdom of the Almighty, after the oxen had gone for a day and a night, the Ark fell off the cart into a grassy field. The animals then broke free of their yoke and trotted off homewards. The Amalakites guessed that they were now freed of the Ark, but instead of rewarding the slave-girl, they put her to death so that she would not reveal their shame.

The Ark had fallen into a field belonging to two young men whose mother was widowed and blind. Soon a number of curious people assembled around the unknown object that lay in the field and they tried to look inside it to see what it contained. But whoever set hand the Ark was struck down dead on the spot. When the two young men, the owners of the field arrived, they found the ox-cart and the Ark and a number of

dead bodies there. They concluded that the box must contain something of importance. They believed, however, that if they went and reported the matter, they would be accused of murder, so they decided to quietly bury the bodies, burn the cart and carry the Ark off into their house, where they hid it from all the world. This they did and the two brothers were Israelites. A short while after they had hidden the Ark in their barn all their affairs mysteriously began to prosper: Their fields yielded hundredfold, all their flocks suddenly gave twin births, until their old, blind mother became suspicious and asked them whether anything unusual had happened to them. But they denied and her nothing of their secret, fearing she might betray the matter, and the wondrous Ark might be taken from them. So the Ark remained with them for several years, and during this time their mother gradually regained her eyesight and she was gave thanks and praised the Lord.

But her two sons by now had realised that all their fortunes were due to the Ark, and they termed it the 'magic box of Mūsā ﷺ and Hārūn ﷺ'. They became irreverent and greedy and the more blessings they received the less they thanked the Lord, and their faith gradually dwindled. The Lord's punishment came upon them one day when they went out to their fields and an enemy raid came upon them. They were surrounded and slain and their old mother remained behind to mourn them. She wept and prayed for their souls, for she understood that greed had corrupted their hearts. Meanwhile their land passed into the hands of the Amalakites and with it the Ark.

In the years that followed, the Banī Isrā'īl increased in numbers, but they were weak because of their disunity and suffered much tribulation at the hands of their enemies. In despair they remembered their Lord and gathered around their priests and wise-men to pray for the Almighty to send them a prophet who might help them recover the Ark, for they realised that their weakness of faith had led to this loss.

60 – ṢAMŪ'ĪL'S عليه السلام BIRTH

THE PROPHET ṢAMŪ'ĪL was born in the year that the Ark was lost. He is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, and although not by name [in Sura The Cow, 2:246–249], scholars agree that it is a reference to Ṣamū'īl, the prophet. Ṣamū'īl was the son of Elkanah, an Ephraimite and his wife Hannah who for a long time could bear no children. In the sadness of her heart she had prayed to the Lord to grant her a son and she vowed to dedicate her son to the service of the Lord. The Lord heard her prayer and she bore a son at Ramah. She named him Ṣamū'īl, which means 'the Lord has heard'. When he was weaned his mother gave him to the priest Eli to be instructed in the Torah, according to her vow, and Ṣamū'īl grew up to be a learned and God-fearing man. When he was twenty-nine years old, he received the call to prophethood and the first man to hear of it was Eli the priest.

Word soon spread through all Israel that the Lord had sent a new prophet, but many people did not believe, saying they wanted the proof of a miracle or that the prophet should have come from their own tribe. Ṣamū'īl عليه السلام began to travel throughout the land, according to the Almighty's command and he preached and taught whoever would listen to him. But many times he was ridiculed and reviled, and even stoned. Four years passed in this way. At last, conditions had become so intolerable in Israel that the heads of the tribes turned to the prophet Ṣamū'īl عليه السلام to help them choose a king from among them to lead them in a decisive battle against Jālūt, in order to regain the Ark. They promised to abide by his decision.

As is told in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Hast thou not regarded the Council of the Banī Isrā'īl, after Mūsā, when they said to a prophet of theirs, 'Raise up for us a king, and we will fight in Allah's way.'*

He said, 'Might it be that, if fighting is prescribed for you, you will not fight?'

They said, 'Why should we not fight in Allah's way, who have been expelled from our habitations and our children?' Yet when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned their backs except a few of them; and Allah has knowledge of the evildoers." [The Cow, 2:246]

61 – ṬĀLŪT IS CHOSEN KING

THE PROPHET ṢAMŪ'ĪL ﷺ asked the heads of the tribes to give him time whilst he waited for a revelation from the Lord. They left him and Ṣamū'īl ﷺ retired to pray.

There was a man of the tribe of Binyamīn whose name was Kish the son of Abiel. He had a son who was a very tall and handsome man. His name was Ṭālūt (Saul in the Bible). One day, when Ṭālūt was herding his father's camels, some of them strayed. Ṭālūt went to look with his servant. They came to the city of Ṣamū'īl ﷺ, and decided to go and pay their respects to the prophet so that he might help them find their lost animals. They approached the prophet and asked him for help. Ṣamū'īl ﷺ however, did not answer them at first, for the angel had appeared to him who informed him of Allah's Will concerning Ṭālūt. Then Ṣamū'īl ﷺ said to Ṭālūt, "O Ṭālūt, Allah has chosen you to rule over all Israel and to be their king! May you always remember His favour, and may your rule be blessed!" Ṭālūt was very much surprised and could not believe this news at first, for the tribe of Binyamīn was held in low esteem by the other tribes. Binyamīn had been Ya'qūb's ﷺ youngest son. Ṭālūt voiced his concern, saying that his tribe, his house and family were of low rank and order and none would look up to him, much less obey him. Ṣamū'īl ﷺ answered, "I know all that, but it is the Will of the Lord."

Ṭālūt then said, "And by what sign shall we know that you speak the truth?" Ṣamū'īl ﷺ replied, "Before you have reached your father's house, the beasts you have been looking for will have been found." This turned out to be true and Ṭālūt stayed

with Ṣamū'īl ﷺ the prophet and ate with him. Then Ṣamū'īl ﷺ blessed Ṭālūt and annointed him. Ṣamū'īl ﷺ then called the chiefs of the tribes and informed them of the Lord's Will.

"Then their prophet said to them, 'Verily, Allah has raised up Ṭālūt for you as king.' They said, 'How should he be king over us who have better right than he to kingship, seeing he has not been given amplitude of wealth?'

He said, 'Allah has chosen him over you and has increased him broadly in knowledge and in body. Allah gives the kingship to whom He will; and Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.'" [The Cow, 2:247]

When the commotion had died down a bit, Ṣamū'īl ﷺ reminded them of their promise to accept the decision of Allah and that Allah gives power to whom He wills regardless of rank or heritage. The chiefs then demanded proof of the truth of this claim. Ṣamū'īl ﷺ said to them,

"The sign of his kingship is that the Ark will come to you. In it a tranquility from your Lord and a remnant of what the folk of Mūsā and Hārūn's folk left behind, the angels bearing it. Surely in that shall be a sign for you, if you are believers." [The Cow, 2:248]

The chiefs all had heard the story of the Ark having landed in the house of the old widow and her two sons, but their land had since passed into the hands of Jālūt, so they were perplexed and said to Ṣamū'īl ﷺ, "How should this be? Thus far we have thought of you as a man of sound reason, but now we are in doubt. How should the Ark be brought to us if it is in the hands of our enemies? Moreover no-one knows for sure where it is? Surely this is madness ..." Ṣamū'īl ﷺ said, "The Ark will be borne by angels and it will be left on the threshold of Ṭālūt's house." The chiefs agreed that if this were to really happen it could be counted as a kind of miracle, and together they proceeded to the house of Ṭālūt. When they arrived there, nothing was to be seen. So they waited and before long they heard a rustling sound in the air. When they looked again they could not believe their eyes, for there was the Ark, standing right before them. No-one had seen it coming. Having experienced such a plain miracle, their spirits rose and their faith was reborn, as was their courage and confidence. All the young men

were now willing to assemble in the army under Ṭālūt's leadership, and before long more than 100,000 had been mustered. They pledged their allegiance as they assembled around the Holy Ark, and Ṣamū'īl ﷺ blessed them. Then they marched off to do battle against Jālūt.

Now the miracle had at first inspired them with courage, but as they marched forward, approaching the dreaded enemy whose king was held by his men to be an immortal and a god, their courage began to fail, and a number of them lagged behind, before finally turning back. Reports reached them that the terrible Jālūt was approaching with eighty-thousand men, and fear struck their hearts. To provide them with more incentive for battle, Ṭālūt promised to give his daughter in marriage to the man who would slay Jālūt and that he would make him his successor to the throne. So they marched on and the heat of the day grew on them. Water is scarce in that region and man and beast both thirsted. When they finally reached a river of sweet water, the soldiers would have fallen on the water and gorged themselves, but Ṭālūt their commander, knowing how harmful it is for a very thirsty man to drink his fill, stopped them and ordered them to drink no more than they could scoop up in their hand, lest they become unfit for battle. This, too, is decribed in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*And when Ṭālūt went forth with the hosts he said, 'Allah will try you with a river. Whosoever drinks of it is not of me, and whoso tastes it not, he is of me, saving him who scoops up with his hand.' But they drank of it, except a few of them and when he crossed it and those who believed with him, they said, 'We have no power today against Jālūt and his hosts.'*

Said those who reckoned they should meet Allah, 'How often a little company has overcome a numerous company, by Allah's leave! And Allah is with the patient.'" [The Cow, 2:249]

But of the seventy-thousand soldiers with him only four thousand obeyed his orders; all the others filled up their bellies with water. When the time came to move on, only these four thousand men felt fit to march; the rest lagged behind, making excuses.

62 – DĀ'ŪD ﷺ SLAYS JĀLŪT

OW AMONG ṬĀLŪT'S MEN there was one man from Bethlehem of the tribe of Yehūda whose his name was Jesse. This is his lineage: Jesse Obed Bo'az Salmon, Nahshon, Amminadab, Ram, Hezron, Perez, Yehūda, Ya'qūb. Jesse had eight sons who bore armour with him, and besides these his youngest son, Dā'ūd who was but a lad of thirteen and tended his father's flocks. He would bring food to his brothers who were soldiers in Ṭālūt's army. Dā'ūd was of medium height and of ruddy complexion. He had reddish hair and beautiful eyes. He was also given to song and when he sang, whoever listened was so entranced by his voice that he wished his song would never end. This was Dā'ūd ﷺ whose name in Hebrew means 'beloved,' and he was the first to be both a prophet and a king over Israel.

When Dā'ūd ﷺ saw the men of Israel preparing for war against Jālūt, he wished to go with them but he was too young to bear armour. He had also been ill recently and he knew his father would never allow him to accompany the soldiers. Dā'ūd ﷺ said to his father, "O father, I am very good with my slingshot, I always hit my target and never miss." His father replied, "Very good, my son. Allah has given you a special tool; you will be a good hunter." He spoke to his son as one might speak to a child when one tries to humour him. But Dā'ūd ﷺ continued, "O father, while I was up in the mountains, I encountered a great mountain lion and I overcame him and rode upon his back, holding on to his ears, and I was not in the least afraid." Again his father smiled and

took his words for the words of a mere boy. But Dā'ūd ﷺ was very serious and he tried once more to tell his father of his strength and courage and of his true faith. He said, "O father, when I am at prayer in the wilderness, all the birds and

wild beasts of the mountain assemble round me to pray with me, and we worship together ..." Again Jesse patted him on the head and made little of his words. Seeing that he had failed to convince his father, Dā'ūd ﷺ asked him openly to let him go to battle along with his brothers. His father answered, "O my youngest son, you will do a lot of fighting yet in your time, but now you are still too small, you must stay with your mother." Dā'ūd's eyes filled with tears and this his father could not bear, so he conceded that Dā'ūd ﷺ should accompany the army to carry the provisions for his brothers.

They set out together and caught up with the army which was one day's march ahead of them. Word had come to Ṣamū'īl ﷺ of the defection of the men at the river and he prayed to the Lord to send aid to Israel and to give the few brave men victory over the enemy. The Lord heard his prayer and Ṣamū'īl ﷺ sent to Ṭālūt a suit of mail, ordering him to have all the men try it on. "The man it fits shall be annointed and chosen by the Lord." — By now, they had come close to the hosts of Jālūt and they beheld the giants from a distance and fear filled their hearts. Ṭālūt ordered all his men to try on the suit of mail the prophet Ṣamū'īl ﷺ had sent, but it fit none of them. Dā'ūd's father and brothers tried it on, but it was too large for them. Ṭālūt was despairing for he feared he would be unable to fulfill the order of the prophet, and he asked Jesse whether he had other sons. Jesse answered, "I have none other than these, save a young lad who is coming after us with our provisions. But he is still green and unfit for battle."

At that very moment, Dā'ūd ﷺ came running up bearing his father's and his brothers' food. He was breathless from running and he said, "Pardon me, father, for having come so late but I was delayed on the road by a very strange thing. I was making my way here when I heard a voice calling to me from the ground. The voice came from three stones that said to me, 'Pick us up and take us with you, for we are parts of the stone of Mūsā ﷺ.' So I stopped to do so and this is why I have come late." "You see," said Jesse to Ṭālūt, "he is but a child." Ṭālūt regarded Jesse's youngest son, and he saw that he was small

and frail from illness, but as it was the prophet's command that every man should try on the suit of mail, he ordered Dā'ūd ﷺ to try on the armour. How great was their wonder when the suit fit Dā'ūd ﷺ perfectly though it had been too large for every other man! Ṭālūt now annointed his forehead and sent him to the front row.

The armies of Jālūt had now drawn close and when the small troop of Ṭālūt's men beheld them their hearts quaked and trembled, so terrible were they and so great their number. Dā'ūd ﷺ marched ahead and faced them fearlessly. His father and brothers began to grieve for him in advance and wondered what they should say to his mother, for they were certain he would be killed. Jālūt laughed and sneered when he saw the small troop of Israelites come forth to face him, but when he beheld the boyish figure of Dā'ūd ﷺ marching ahead of them all he felt, for the first time in his life, deadly fear, though he could not have said why. However, despite his anxiety he spoke belittling words to Dā'ūd ﷺ, "O child," he said, "for you are not even a youth, go home to your mother and leave this fighting to grown men. My heart feels pity for you." Dā'ūd ﷺ gave the shortest of answers. "No!" he cried, and placing the three stones he had picked up on his way in his slingshot, he aimed and hurled them at the giant. By the Will of Allah they melted together and struck Jālūt on his forehead. They pierced his skull and entered his brain, and Jālūt fell like a tower and was slain. The men of both armies were stupefied with surprise and astonishment. Then Dā'ūd ﷺ signalled for the battle to begin, and the small troop of Israelites fell upon the mighty army of Jālūt. Having lost their god-king and general, Jālūt's soldiers were in a state of wild panic and confusion, and by sundown they were completely routed. Dā'ūd ﷺ also fought in the battle, but of all the booty he only carried off the head of Jālūt on the tip of his lance. So with the help of the Almighty, the Israelites overpowered a mighty foe, as it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*So, when they went forth against Jālūt and his hosts, they said, 'Our Lord, pour out upon us patience, and make firm our feet and give us aid against the people of the unbelievers!'*

And they routed them, by the leave of Allah, and Dā'ūd slew Jālūt and Allah gave him the kingship and Wisdom, and He taught him such as He willed. Had Allah not driven back the people, some by the means of others, the earth had surely corrupted: but Allah is bounteous unto all beings." [The Cow, 2:250–251]

When news of the victory reached the towns, most people could not believe it at first and the soldiers who had turned back were biting their nails with regret. The tribesmen who had refused their help to Yehūda thought it was a rumour circulated by Ṭālūt, and they came to the prophet Ṣamū'īl ﷺ in anger, demanding to know the truth. Ṣamū'īl ﷺ said, "If this was not the truth, where are the armies of Jālūt? They must be here by now, for who is there to stop them? You will see our armies return victoriously before three hours have passed." The chiefs were still doubtful, but before long a messenger arrived who had been on the battlefield and who confirmed all they had already heard. Ṣamū'īl ﷺ looked at the chiefs as if to say, "Was there anything else you wanted to know?" but they hung their heads, ashamed of their faintheartedness. The messenger added that in three hours the victorious army would reach the town, so quickly they made ready a feast to welcome their heroes. The women were overjoyed to welcome back their valiant men who had saved their lives and honour. Soon the Muslim army came in sight and the townspeople lined the streets. Ṣamū'īl ﷺ sat in the place of honour, radiant as the sun, surrounded by the tribal chiefs as by a wreath of dark clouds. At the head of the procession marched King Ṭālūt, followed by Dā'ūd ﷺ carrying the head of Jālūt on his spear. As they passed, cries of great cheering broke out, and Ṭālūt believed that the applause was for him. When he heard the words of the women's songs, all his gladness was poisoned for they sang not of his glory, but of the greater glory of Dā'ūd ﷺ: "Ṭālūt has slain his thousands, but Dā'ūd has slain his tens of thousands ..." This was the beginning of his great and consuming jealousy of Dā'ūd, for he understood then that people loved not him but Dā'ūd ﷺ who was only a boy of thirteen and favoured by the Lord.

63 — ṬĀLŪT'S ENVY OF DĀ'ŪD عليه السلام

ṬĀLŪT COULD NOT FORGET the people's preference for Dā'ūd عليه السلام which he regarded as a slight to his person, but he hid his jealousy in his heart and guarded it well, outwardly making the greatest show of affection for Dā'ūd عليه السلام. He kept him by his side and made sure they were always seen together in public. But the poison of envy was eating its way into his heart and Shayṭān had possession of him. Six months had passed since Dā'ūd عليه السلام had slain Jālūt, and still Ṭālūt had not rewarded him for his heroic feat as he had promised. There was a very rich man at the time named Adriel of Meholath who had asked for the king's eldest daughter Merab, offering Ṭālūt a palace full of gold for her. Ṭālūt was not a man to refuse such an offer, and his daughter Merab was of like mind. So Dā'ūd عليه السلام said to Ṭālūt, "Who am I a poor man from a poor family to become the king's son-in-law?" Merab was quite content with the outcome and married Adriel, the rich man. But her younger sister Michal was inclined towards Dā'ūd عليه السلام and Ṭālūt was told of this. The news pleased Ṭālūt for he conceived in his heart a plan to rid himself of Dā'ūd عليه السلام.

One evening, Ṭālūt went to see his younger daughter Michal in her palace and found her with eyes full of tears. "What ails you, my child ? Tell me quickly so that I might punish him who has hurt you," he said. His daughter answered him, "O father, you do not understand. Was it not the Almighty who raised you to this station when you were nothing? Why then do you not abide by His Law and fulfill your promise?" "What makes you say this, O my daughter?" She replied, "Today I was feeling restless and I strolled out into the fields under the open sky. There I chanced upon Dā'ūd who was all alone, singing to his Lord and strumming on his harp. I hid myself and listened to him. O father, if you could only have heard that song, your heart would have melted away as did mine! All the heavens and the earth held their breath and listened to him. And when he paused to perform his devotions, the birds and the beasts gath-

ered around and prayed with him. My heart has been touched by his song and I am sick with longing."

"And We gave Dā'ūd bounty from Us: 'O you mountains, echo Allah's praises with him, and you birds!'" [Sabā', 34:10]

The fires of jealousy that Ṭālūt had sought to extinguish were rekindled at his daughter's words. He controlled himself and asked her to tell him what else she knew of Dā'ūd ﷺ. "Everyone says he is very fair-spoken and wise." she said. "His judgement is just and fair. His wisdom is far beyond his years. They say it is his practice to fast one day and to eat the next; he spends half the night in prayer and devotion, his piety is renowned." Ṭālūt laughed and said to his daughter, "I have understood, my child. You are enamoured of Dā'ūd. But why is it that you insist on praising so much of his spiritual virtues when what is attractive to young girls is mostly the physical aspect of a person? Anyway, I will see what I can do for you. I wished to marry him to your sister, but he insisted that he was too poor and unfit to be the son-in-law of the king of Israel." "Is then lack of possessions the measure of a person's worth, father?" cried Michal. "How can you think that way? My regard for you, father, will not change, even if I am given all the gems in the world." "Yes," Ṭālūt said quickly, "I am of the same opinion, but you know it is the custom. Perhaps tomorrow it will change into its opposite. Maybe it will be the girls' parents who pay the dowry, but for now it is as you and I know it, so what can we do?" "The people will become suspicious of a king who does not keep his word. Already they are talking about you. If you prefer you may marry one of my sister's to him. I am concerned mainly that you fulfill your promise and that Dā'ūd's ﷺ light enters our palace ..."

Ṭālūt left his daughter and thought all night long about what she had said and he saw that she was right. However, Shayṭān had entered his heart and he was loathe to do it. He returned to Michal and informed her of his intention to make Dā'ūd ﷺ his son-in-law. "But," he said, "I cannot force him. He is poor and if he refuses on the grounds of his poverty, what can I do?" Michal said, "May it please Allah to make this easy for him."

Soon after this, it was reported to the palace that Dā'ūd ﷺ had been seen in the marketplace, fashioning iron coats of mail for the soldiers, and that he did this without the help of a fire or a furnace. He simply melted the iron in his hand as if it were candle-wax.

"*And We taught him the fashioning of garments for you, to fortify you against your violence;*" [The Prophets, 21:80]

"*And We gave Dā'ūd bounty from Us: 'O you mountains, echo Allah's praises with him and you birds!' And We softened for him iron: 'Fashion wide coats of mail, and measure well the links.'*" [Sabā', 34:10]

Michal was gladdened by this news and hoped that Dā'ūd ﷺ would be able to save money to pay for her bridal gift. She thanked the Lord for giving him this miraculous strength and power. She went herself into the marketplace to see Dā'ūd's ﷺ work, but she was disappointed. She saw Dā'ūd ﷺ at work making suits of mail for the soldiers with his bare hands, but he took no money for his work or only a token sum. Barely enough to pay for his daily bread, let alone her bridal sum! That evening, her father Ṭālūt had invited all the heads of the tribes of Israel to the palace to discuss Dā'ūd's ﷺ future and Dā'ūd ﷺ was present among the assembly. Ṭālūt spoke to him, "O my son, it has made me very happy to see that you have seriously begun to think about making a living for yourself and your future family. Fashioning armour is a well-paid craft and I see you are doing well at it. For how long have you been practising this profession?" "For six days now," Dā'ūd ﷺ replied. "And how many coats of mail are you able to complete in one day?" asked Ṭālūt. "Twenty," Said Dā'ūd ﷺ. Ṭālūt was incredulous, but all those present confirmed it and told also how Dā'ūd ﷺ worked with his bare hands and without the use of fire. In this way he was able to complete his work quickly. "So if you can sell so many suits of mail, you will be ready to pay the bridal gift for my daughter very soon?" said Ṭālūt. Daud ﷺ answered, "What bridal gift, O my king? There was a time when you had promised your daughter to the man who would slay Jālūt, but you kept not your word. Once you offered me the hand of your

eldest daughter, but I was not in a position to accept because of my poverty. I have given up the idea of becoming the king's son-in-law for I cannot pay the bridal price. The Lord has given me the skill of melting iron in my hand and I fashion the soldiers' armour for the Lord's good pleasure and as a service to Israel, not for gain. I am not permitted to take more than I need for my daily bread." The chiefs of Israel took Dā'ūd's عليه السلام side, for they felt that he had spoken justly, and it cut Ṭālūt to the quick. He said, "Yes, my son, you are right, and I am also right. As king of Israel, I have the right to ask a bridal gift for my daughter. So let it be from the spoils of war. I will place you at the head of the army. Go and fight the Philistines and bring me one-hundred of their foreskins. Then I will give to you my daughter Michal." To this Dā'ūd عليه السلام agreed and the assembly was concluded.

Now Ṭālūt hoped that Dā'ūd عليه السلام might fall at the hands of the Philistines, and he sent him on this expedition without the protection of the Ark. People marked this fact well and grumbled against the king. "Clearly Ṭālūt is envious of Dā'ūd عليه السلام, for he has sent him to war against a fierce enemy without the protection of the holy Ark. He wishes for his death, and with him thousands of our men will perish." But Allah Almighty protected Dā'ūd عليه السلام and gave him victory in battle. He returned from the campaign with two-hundred Philistine fore-skins and Ṭālūt married him to his daughter Michal the very same day.

Now that Dā'ūd عليه السلام was the son-in-law of the king, Ṭālūt saw himself completely shadowed by the presence of this sun in his palace. Dā'ūd عليه السلام loved him sincerely and showed him nothing but respect and affection, but the more Dā'ūd عليه السلام loved him, the greater Ṭālūt's enmity grew and hatred born of envy. Ṭālūt had a son, Jonathan, who became Dā'ūd's عليه السلام friend, and Jonathan loved Dā'ūd عليه السلام as he loved his own soul. If he had not seen Dā'ūd عليه السلام for a whole day he could not sleep at night. Great was their friendship, for Dā'ūd عليه السلام also loved Jonathan.

Ṭālūt continued to be king of Israel, but he suffered most from his own iniquity and the evil spirit of envy that had taken possession of him and poisoned his whole life. He sensed that he

was not as well-loved as Dā'ūd ﷺ among his people. He knew not the Law and the Torah as Dā'ūd ﷺ did, nor had he won any great military victories for himself. He had a low opinion of himself and prayed to the Lord to send him an opportunity for gaining fame and glory on the battlefield.

One day, the prophet Ṣamū'īl ﷺ sent for Ṭālūt and said to him, "It has been revealed to me that the Lord wishes you to go out and fight the Madyanites who have remained unbelievers to this day and are now inciting trouble at the borders. You shall fight them to the death and leave not a soul alive nor take any booty of their goods and their flocks, for you shall be the instrument of Allah's Wrath upon them." Ṭālūt rejoiced when he heard these words from the prophet for it seemed to him the opportunity to prove his own worth, both to himself and to his people. He prepared for war and set out on the campaign. With the help of Allah, he triumphed over the Madyanites and routed them. Ṣamū'īl ﷺ had commanded him to destroy their land utterly, leaving not a stone unturned, smashing all their idols and leaving not a soul alive, no man, woman or child, so as to prepare the land for settlement by the believers. But when he had taken the land, Shayṭān conquered Ṭālūt's mind, and he said to himself, "Shall I then return from this battle empty-handed? How will I make people believe that we have won a great victory and how will I appear in their eyes? They will count only the number of our men slain in battle and they will assume that we lost the war. Surely this time the prophet was mistaken. I will take back the king of Madyan as my prisoner, along with his flocks and treasures. Then people will realise that I have won a great victory even without the help of Dā'ūd."

So Ṭālūt returned with the king of Madyan as his prisoner, and he led off with him all his flocks and valuables. The Israelites welcomed back their triumphant king and began to show him more respect. Ṭālūt convinced himself that soon he would make them forget Dā'ūd ﷺ and that he would become their favourite. But one day the prophet Ṣamū'īl ﷺ came before him, full of holy anger. "O Ṭālūt," he said to the king,

"did not the Lord appoint you king of Israel while you were a man of common rank?" "So it was," answered Ṭālūt. "And when they clamoured for a miracle to prove your claim, did the Lord not send down the Ark into your courtyard?" "Yes, he did." "And when you were left with only four thousand steadfast men to fight Jālūt and his army of eighty-thousand, did not the Lord send you Dā'ūd who alone was able to slay Jālūt with a stone, by the Grace of Him Almighty? And are there not innumerable other favours the Lord has bestowed upon you? Answer me, Ṭālūt, why have you disobeyed the Lord though I made plain to you His Will and Command?" "But I have obeyed," said Ṭālūt, "I went out and made war on the Madyanites and the Lord granted me success." "And why have you let the king of Madyan live and brought him with you with all his treasure and his flocks, even though this was forbidden to you?" Ṭālūt said, "I have brought them here to offer them to the Lord as sacrifice." "No," cried Ṣamū'īl ﷺ, "that is not true. You brought them with you so that you might convince your people of your might and your success. You did this to garner favour in their eyes. By so doing you have lost everything. You have lost favour in the sight of the Lord. The Lord reveals to me that He has taken the kingship from your house. Your descendants will not rule over Israel, He has stripped your house of this honour forever." Ṭālūt's brow darkened and he knew not what to answer. Ṣamū'īl ﷺ got up to leave. Ṭālūt wished to ask the prophet to pray for his forgiveness, for in his heart he knew he had done wrong, but he found not the words. So Ṣamū'īl ﷺ left and Ṭālūt never saw him again.

Ṣamū'īl ﷺ called for Dā'ūd ﷺ and Dā'ūd ﷺ accompanied him all the way back to Ramah. No one knows of what they spoke on that journey, only an escorting soldier heard Ṣamū'īl ﷺ ask Dā'ūd ﷺ how old he was. Dā'ūd ﷺ answered, "I am now thirty years of age." When they reached the village of Nayut, Ṣamū'īl's ﷺ birthplace, Ṣamū'īl ﷺ fell ill and took his bed, and he did not rise again. Before Ṭālūt reached the village, the prophet Ṣamū'īl ﷺ had died. He was buried in his house at Ramah and everyone mourned for him.

On the way home, Ṭālūt rested at Khalīl (Hebron) and visited the tombs of the Patriarchs there. When he went aside to relieve himself, he overheard a conversation between two common foot soldiers. One said, "Now that Ṣamū'īl ﷺ has gone, I wonder who will be prophet after him." "Only Allah knows that," said the other. "Yes, that is true, but let me tell you one thing. It seems plain to me that there is no man more excellent in all the kingdom than Dā'ūd. He is learned and wise. Such qualities as are in him are found in no other man in these times. Certainly not with Ṭālūt, our king. He is king and may have power in worldly matters but a prophet can come only from among the ranks of the learned, the Rabbis or priests." "That is just your wishful thinking," said the other man, "Allah can make a prophet of whom He wills. How many prophets have come who were not learned at all, unlettered and simple, but possessed of the holy spirit?"

All the way home from Hebron, Ṭālūt was unable to forget the words he had overheard. They were like salt upon his wounds. They troubled him so much that he forgot all the prophet had said to him, that the loss of his kingship was a thing decreed in the Divine Presence. He simply could not believe it. He began to suffer delusions, and saw enemies everywhere who were seeking to overthrow his throne. Now Ṭālūt sought ways to do away with Dā'ūd ﷺ and he moved his principal city out of Yehūda and went to Gibeah, near Jericho. Dā'ūd ﷺ as a member of the royal household went with Ṭālūt and people often complained to him of Ṭālūt's misrule of their land. But Dā'ūd ﷺ always answered in the king's defense and made excuses for him. There were men who understood Ṭālūt's heart and they tried to warn Dā'ūd ﷺ of his intentions. "O Dā'ūd," they would say, "do not trust Ṭālūt for he is a victim of his own delusions. He may strike out at you at any time." In time, he spoke openly to his sons of ways to remove Dā'ūd ﷺ from their midst and so Jonathan came to know of the danger and warned his friend Dā'ūd ﷺ.

64 – DĀ'ŪD ﷺ FLEES FROM ṬĀLŪT

ONE NIGHT, Jonathan spoke for a long time to his father trying to convince him of Dā'ūd's innocence and sincerity until he had awakened Ṭālūt's conscience, so that he repented. But the spirit of Ṭālūt was inconstant, and after he retired into his private apartments, he sat up alone for a long time, his spear in his hand, and dark, bitter thoughts enveloped him again. Dā'ūd ﷺ approached him with his harp to play for him and to lighten his mood as he was accustomed to doing. As Dā'ūd ﷺ came in and smiled at Ṭālūt, the evil spirit possessed him and he hurled his spear at Dā'ūd ﷺ and would have pinned him to the wall, had not Dā'ūd ﷺ evaded the spear by a rapid turn sideways. Dā'ūd ﷺ was saddened by this and asked the king what fault he found in him. Had he not always been loyal to him as a son?

Ṭālūt made excuses and retired. Dā'ūd ﷺ understood that the time had come for him to flee, for his life was in danger. He saw that Ṭālūt no longer had any control over what he did and his envious spirit controlled him totally. Dā'ūd ﷺ returned to his wife Michal and told her of his fears. He had her fill a goatskin with wine and place it in his bed where he slept. Then she helped him escape through the window. Dā'ūd ﷺ hid himself in the garden and waited. Before long he heard angry voices from his room. It was Ṭālūt. He had come to kill him. Finding only the goat-hair bag, he was scolding his daughter for having let Dā'ūd ﷺ escape. Michal said, "He threatened me," and her father replied, "So how did that goatskin get into his bed? Dā'ūd ﷺ never drank wine and now my spear draws only red wine instead of Dā'ūd's blood!"

Dā'ūd ﷺ could now no longer doubt that his life was in danger. When all was quiet he left his hiding place and fetched four of his own arrows. Then he went to Ṭālūt's rooms in the dead hour of night and entered unnoticed. He placed an arrow at each of the corners of Ṭālūt's bed as a sign that he could have killed the king but had refrained from doing so. The next morning, Ṭālūt awoke and Dā'ūd ﷺ was gone. He beheld the

four arrows and understood. The devil left him for a moment and he felt true remorse. He called for his son Jonathan for he knew of their friendship and he swore holy oaths that he would not harm Dā'ūd. He only wished for his return. His heart was sore with longing for him. Jonathan went out to find Dā'ūd ﷺ among the rocks where he had hidden himself. They embraced and wept for a long time. Jonathan reported to him all he had seen and heard, but knowing the inconstancy of his father's spirit he counselled Dā'ūd ﷺ not to return but to go into exile and hiding. Dā'ūd ﷺ accepted this and left for Hebron and Ramah. Yet he continued to love Ṭālūt and he grieved for him.

It came to pass as Jonathan had foreseen: after a moment of forgiveness, Ṭālūt began to persecute Dā'ūd ﷺ anew and his changes of mood became unpredictable. So Dā'ūd ﷺ remained in hiding and only his friend Jonathan knew where to find him.

At the new moon of each month there was a customary feast at the palace at which all the heads of Israel were obliged to attend lest they be ranked among the dissenters. Again Ṭālūt had decided to pardon Dā'ūd ﷺ and Jonathan was sent to tell him he was expected at the banquet. Dā'ūd ﷺ was hiding at the rock of Ezel and waited. On the second night of the feast, Ṭālūt asked, "Where is Dā'ūd? Why is his seat empty, if he be free of guilt?" He intended to expose Dā'ūd ﷺ as a rebellious traitor before the assembled heads of Israel. But Jonathan knew his intention, and answered, "He would have come and earnestly begged your pardon but there is an important sacrifice he must attend with his tribe at Bethlehem." Then Jonathan went to tell Dā'ūd ﷺ that the time of parting had come and that from now on he must seek safety in exile. They parted tearfully for they loved each other more than two brothers.

Dā'ūd ﷺ turned towards Nob to find the priest Ahimelech to whom was entrusted the sword of Jālūt. The priests, seeing he had come alone, knew of his difficulties and asked no questions of Dā'ūd ﷺ but gave him their assistance. Before he left them Dā'ūd ﷺ asked them for the sword of Jālūt. They gave it to him, blessing Dā'ūd ﷺ whom they knew to be of the righteous.

Ṭālūt came to know of Dā'ūd's ﷺ visit to the priests and he summoned Ahimelech and all the priests of Nob to his court. He accused them of having assisted a traitor and for that he had them all put to death. In that way he rid himself of the priests and wisemen by whom he felt outdone in wisdom and whom his envy could not tolerate.

In those days Ṭālūt also gave Michal, Dā'ūd's wife, to a man named Paltiel, the son of Laish of Gallim. Now Dā'ūd ﷺ was no longer the son-in-law of the king, and Ṭālūt felt himself free from obligation towards him. But Dā'ūd ﷺ continued to pray that the Lord might lead Ṭālūt on the way of righteousness.

Dā'ūd ﷺ gathered around him a small band of faithful followers and they roamed the land by the southern borders of the kingdom, fleeing from one hiding place to the next, for Ṭālūt's men went after them. They lived in caves and fought in many small border skirmishes to secure the peace in Israel. During one such campaign, a man named Nabal from Carmel insulted Dā'ūd ﷺ, and the Lord punished him. His widow was a pious and beautiful woman, and Dā'ūd ﷺ took her for a wife. He also married Ahinoam of Jezreel and he begot sons and daughters.

For seven years Dā'ūd ﷺ continued his life of roaming and fighting both openly and in secret, and Ṭālūt's men could not catch up with him. Once he was hiding in the caves of the wilderness of Ziph to the southeast of the Dead Sea. Dā'ūd ﷺ was told by his men that Ṭālūt had come and that they had a good chance of surprising him and gaining the upper hand. But Dā'ūd ﷺ ordered them to remain safely hidden and not to attack. Ṭālūt and his men searched the area for some days, but finding no-one, they gave up the search.

One night, Ṭālūt was sitting outside his tent on a great rock, musing to himself with a heavy heart. He was so absorbed in his thoughts that Dā'ūd slipped up to him unnoticed and cut off the skirt of his robe. Only when he rose to go to his tent Ṭālūt became aware of what had happened and he understood that only the man who had planted arrows at the four corners of his bed and refrained from murdering him could have done this to him. He called out into the darkness and opened his heart

to Dā'ūd ﷺ, saying, "O Dā'ūd, you have taught me a lesson. I have done you only harm. I drove you into exile and gave your wife to another man. I have persecuted you all the days of your life and made you a hunted fugitive and yet you have spared my life on two occasions. Why is it you do not repay me in kind?" Dā'ūd ﷺ answered him from out of the darkness," "O Ṭālūt, it is because I have not given up hope in you. There is an evil spirit which possesses your heart from time to time, and I believe it will depart from you one day for good, for you are annointed to the Lord Almighty. Our story shall become a lesson of wisdom for all the generations of Israel yet to come. If I were to slay you now it would mean the outbreak of a great civil war and bloodshed in Israel, and there would be no blessing in that." Ṭālūt then begged Dā'ūd ﷺ to return with him and to rule by his side and to help him against the dark forces that possessed his heart. But Dā'ūd ﷺ knew this was not to be and said no more. He remained in the darkness and prayed. Then he slipped away like a shadow and Ṭālūt remained behind, his heart heavy and constricted.

When he returned to Gibeah, he wept day and night for his sinfulness, and all he had done to Dā'ūd ﷺ passed before his mind's eye as if on a screen. He lamented and wept for himself and knew not what to do in order to seek the Lord's forgiveness. As he had put all the priests and learned of the land to death, he had nobody to consult with and none to advise him how do repent and atone for his sins. Ṭālūt grew more desperate. One day, he went to the graveyard and invoked the souls of the priests and Rabbis whom he had slaughtered to send him a sign. It seemed to him that they all spoke from their graves in one voice. They seemed to say, "O Ṭālūt, is it not enough that you put us to death? Do you wish to continue persecuting us even into the grave?" Ṭālūt returned to his apartments feeling the reproach of the dead souls weighing heavily upon his conscience.

One night, as he sat weeping, one of his guards came to him, and such was the state of his melancholy that Ṭālūt found relief in opening his heart even to the plain man who was his servant.

"O my officer," he said, "I have slain all my wisemen and the learned of Israel. Who is there now to give me advice? How can I find forgiveness for my sins, what must I do?" The soldier said to the king, "One day, a cruel king came to a village and ordered all the cocks to be slaughtered and cooked. Then as he lay down to sleep he said, 'I wish to be woken by the cock's crow.' You, O my king, are like this man: you have killed all the men and women of learning in this land and now you would ask their advice!" Ṭālūt nodded and sighed and wept even more bitterly than before. The soldier saw that his king was sincere this time and he made him promise not to punish him if he would help him. Ṭālūt assured him, and the man confessed to having disobeyed Ṭālūt's order, from the pity in his heart, when he had spared one old woman who was a seer. To her he could now lead the king. The king begged him to take him there, and so they went to the house of the woman at Endor. He implored her to help him and to repay his evil with good, and at last she gave him counsel. She told him to go to the grave of the prophet Ṣamū'īl ﷺ and to ask of him what he must do. Ṭālūt at once went to Ramah and threw himself upon the prophet's grave. He asked his question and waited for an answer to come out of the grave, but as he listened he heard a voice within his own breast and he knew it was the prophet speaking to him in his heart. This is what he heard, "O Ṭālūt, I cannot tell you whether your repentance is acceptable or not, but this is what you must do: Go out and fight in the *jihād* that is to come; take part in it not as a king and general who follows the battle from afar, but as a common foot-soldier. Then you will attain your goal!"

Ṭālūt returned to Gibeah. There he had news of an attack of the Philistines and he prepared for war. He went out with his sons, among them Jonathan, to fight as common men and they were surrounded by the enemy on the hill of Gilboa and fell there as martyrs, having fought bravely to the end. Dā'ūd ﷺ heard the news and he mourned for both Ṭālūt and his son Jonathan. He believed that Ṭālūt's death as a martyr had cleansed him of all his sin and that it was a sign of Allah's forgiveness. But

what of Jonathan, why did he have to die? Dā'ūd ﷺ thought he had found an answer to console himself in his grief. Jonathan was too pure a soul to be soiled by worldly affairs, so Allah had taken him from the world before he had to suffer the trial of kingship. Dā'ūd ﷺ remembered also the prophet Ṣamū'īl's ﷺ words that the kingship should not remain in the house of Ṭālūt after his death. Still, they set up Ishbosheth, the son of Ṭālūt, as king to succeed his father. Dā'ūd ﷺ retired to Hebron for two years, for he wished not to create disunity among the tribes of Israel. And the house of Yehūda followed Dā'ūd ﷺ and his people loved him.

65 — LUQMĀN

LUQMĀN IS MENTIONED in the Holy Qur'ān as a wise man, endowed with knowledge from the Almighty:

"Indeed We gave Luqmān wisdom. Give thanks to Allah. Whosoever gives thanks gives thanks only for his own soul's good and whosoever is ungrateful — surely Allah is All-sufficient, All-laudable." [Luqmān, 31:12]

It is not certain whether Luqmān was sent as a prophet or whether he held the station of sainthood, but his wisdom has been acclaimed through the ages.

One day, Luqmān appeared in Israel and his men came to Dā'ūd ﷺ at Hebron and told him of the arrival of a very wise and learned man to whom Allah had granted knowledge as to no other man of his time, although "his skin is black". Dā'ūd ﷺ admonished his men and reminded them that the Lord looks not upon the colour of a man's skin, but at the "colour", that is the condition of his heart. Allah gives knowledge to whom He wills. He reproached them for their racial pride and prejudice and had them convey his ﷺ to Luqmān, hoping that they would meet.

Some sources claim that Luqmān was a descendent of the tribe of 'Ād. His people related that Luqmān used to keep eagles. He raised and fed them all the days of his life. Now the life-span of an eagle is eighty years. Luqmān counted his years by the years of his eagles. When he came to Israel he had raised four eagles. Therefore he must have been over 320 years of age. During all his days he had seven eagles and when the last bird flew out no more, people knew that Luqmān had died. According to this estimate Luqmān's days must have numbered 560 years. It is probable that he died in the time of Yunūs ﷺ, but only Allah knows.

Luqmān was sent as a teacher to the people of Israel when they had need of such teaching. He met with Dā'ūd ﷺ and

recognized in him the signs of prophethood though this had not yet been disclosed to Dā'ūd ﷺ himself. Dā'ūd ﷺ asked him to stay on in the land of Israel as his people were again in danger of backsliding and of being corrupted by the ways of the idolaters surrounding them. Luqmān agreed and settled there with his family.

Luqmān had a son and his words of admonishment to him are recorded in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*And when Luqmān said to his son, admonishing him, 'O my son, do not associate others with Allah; to associate others with Allah is a mighty wrong.' 'O my son, if it should be but the weight of one grain of mustard-seed and though it be in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth, Allah shall bring it forth; surely Allah is All-Subtle, All-Aware. O my son, perform the prayer and bid unto honour and forbid dishonour. And bear patiently whatever may befall thee; surely that is true constancy. Turn not thy cheek away from men in scorn and walk not in the earth exultantly; Allah loves not any man proud and boastful. Be modest in thy walk, and lower thy voice; the most hideous of voices is the voice of the ass.*'" [Luqmān: 31:13-19]

66 – DĀ'ŪD ﷺ AS PROPHET AND KING

FOR SEVEN YEARS Dā'ūd ﷺ had hidden from the persecution of Ṭālūt. He bore his plight with patience for he knew that Ṭālūt was the annointed of the Lord. The Lord had informed Ṣamū'īl ﷺ that the kingship would be torn from the house of Ṭālūt after his death and so Dā'ūd ﷺ did not swear allegiance to Ishbosheth, the son of Ṭālūt but waited for the Lord to reveal His Command. But Ishbosheth was his enemy.

One evening, when Dā'ūd ﷺ and his men had prayed the prayer at sundown, and Dā'ūd ﷺ took up his harp to play for them, Abner the son of Ner, arrived. He came as a messenger from Ishbosheth, asking Dā'ūd ﷺ to come the next day at noon to a certain place and join with them in a campaign against neighbouring tribes. Dā'ūd ﷺ promised that he would be there and the messenger left. Dā'ūd ﷺ took up his harp again and

sang to his men. His voice was enchanting and his poems and songs were inspired by Divine Love. All the birds and beasts would come out of hiding and would listen to Dā'ūd ﷺ with rapture and abandon, having lost all fear of man. Dā'ūd's ﷺ men said to him, "Let us not go to the meeting place for we fear it is a trap; they will surround us there and overcome us. We fear their deceitfulness." But Dā'ūd ﷺ said he had given his word and he trusted in the Lord to lead him.

After all his men had gone to sleep, Dā'ūd ﷺ remained by himself for a long time, deeply sunk in his reflections. In the darkest hour of night, he suddenly beheld a light in the distance, which drew near. Dā'ūd ﷺ sensed that it was not an earthly light. This light grew until it filled all the horizon and Dā'ūd ﷺ heard a voice come from this light. It was the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ, come to announce to Dā'ūd ﷺ that the Lord had chosen him as His Prophet and to bring him the first verses of the scripture he was to be given, the Zabūr, the Psalms.

"*And thy Lord knows very well all who are in the heavens and in the earth; and We have preferred some prophets over others;and We gave to Dā'ūd the Zabūr.*" [The Night Journey, 17:57]

All night Dā'ūd ﷺ conversed with the angel and Jibrā'īl ﷺ taught him from the wisdom of the Lord. He left him at dawn and Dā'ūd ﷺ awakened his men to pray with him the dawn prayer. Then he disclosed to his men what had been revealed to him during the night. Great was the joy of his men and they made ready to follow him to Hebron where he would proclaim his prophethood and kingship to all people. But first there was the meeting for which he had given Abner his word.

When Dā'ūd ﷺ reached the meeting place, he sat down and began to sing and play upon his harp. Again the wild beasts of prey came out of the woods and assembled around Dā'ūd ﷺ and listened to his song, as if they were tame lap-dogs. Abner and his men were indeed planning an ambush. They approached cautiously, making no sound. But the wild beasts perceived the scent of their coming and began to growl. Dā'ūd's men were warned and reached for their weapons, but Dā'ūd ﷺ called for Abner to step out into the open. Abner came out and asked,

"What is this, — is this some show of magic?" "No," answered Dā'ūd ﷺ, "these animals bear testimony to my appointment as Allah's prophet and king of all Israel, as He Almighty has commanded me to be. Come, my brothers, bear witness as well and let us go together to your leader and inform him of the Will of the Lord." "And what of the son of Ṭālūt?" asked Abner. "You may tell him that his kingship has come to an end, as the prophet Ṣamū'īl ﷺ already told his father in days past. Come with me and heal the rift in the state of Israel!" But Abner said, "I have pledged loyalty to my king, the son of Ṭālūt." "Then I will proceed alone to Hebron and the house of Yehūda is with me. There will be strife between us until you have accepted the truth from your Lord."

So Dā'ūd ﷺ was king at first over Yehūda at Hebron and he preached to them according to what had been revealed to him He was ordered by his Lord to fight in order to achieve the unity of Israel. He had made Luqmān the Wise his vizier. One day, they went out to the Mount of Olives and stood gazing on the city of Jebus before them, which was later to be called Jerusalem. Its buildings and streets had fallen into neglect and decay. Dā'ūd ﷺ received a Divine command to rebuild the city once more and to transfer the Holy Ark to it and to make Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom. It later became known as the city of Dā'ūd ﷺ, al-Quds to the Arabs and is the third most revered place for the Muslims today. It is also reported that Dā'ūd ﷺ beheld a vision as he stood gazing at the city: he saw a great rock suspended in mid-air encircled by many angels above and below. Dā'ūd ﷺ received the inspiration to build a house of worship where that rock was hovering. When the temple was build in this place the rock could be seen plainly suspended and held in place with no visible support, but in later times when the believers no longer possessed such strength of faith, they filled in the ground around the rock so that it now appears to be a cave with walls of rock and clay. This site is now known as the Dome of the Rock.

But still Ishbosheth ruled over the city of Jebus. He had hoped that Dā'ūd's small kingdom would soon collapse, but

he was mistaken. The house of Dā'ūd ﷺ grew strong and that of Ṭālūt grew weaker. Dā'ūd ﷺ fortified his position by making peace with his neighbours and his people grew to love him more and more for his justice and prophetic wisdom.

One day, a quarrel arose between Abner and Ishbosheth. Abner was accused of taking another man's wife. Abner grew very angry at this and said, "Have I not served you loyally all this time that you should now suspect me because of a woman? Perhaps I was wrong all along, for has not the Lord promised to make Dā'ūd ﷺ king of all Israel?" Abner then sent word to Dā'ūd ﷺ offering his assistance to him. Dā'ūd ﷺ answered, "I accept your help under the condition that you send back to me my wife Michal whom Ṭālūt has taken from me." Abner send word to Ishbosheth and he grew afraid, so he took Michal away from her husband Paltiel of Laish and sent her to Dā'ūd at Hebron. Then Abner came before Dā'ūd ﷺ and they spoke together, and Abner departed in peace. But on his way, he was pursued and ambushed by Yo'ab for the blood of his brother and was slain. When the news came to Dā'ūd ﷺ, he wept for Abner, and people understood that it had not been the king's will to kill Abner. When Ishbosheth learned that the commander of his army, Abner was dead, he wept also and his courage failed him. As he lay in his tent taking his noonday rest, two of his men came in and slew him. They cut off his head and brought it to Dā'ūd ﷺ. Dā'ūd ﷺ disliked them for their treachery and had them both put to death and buried the head of Ishbosheth beside Abner at Hebron.

Now Dā'ūd ﷺ was king over all Israel. His reign lasted forty years. During all this time, the revelation of the Zabūr continued. It consisted of 150 chapters and it was a book of song and praise of Allah. In it was revealed that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord; whoever acts not in accordance with his knowledge, Shayṭān will be his companion; a dervish who sways from his path in order to gain the favour of worldly lords is equal to the dogs; and a rich man who gives nothing to the poor is likened to the pig. In theHoly Qur'ān, the Zabūr is mentioned several times:

"For We have written in the Zabūr, after the Remembrance, 'The earth shall be the inheritance of My righteous servants.' Surely in this is a message delivered unto a people who serve." [The Prophets, 21:105-106]

In this passage, "the earth" refers to the Holy Land stretching from Shām to Sinai. A great many prophets arose in that land and are now buried there. The prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ asked the Lord how it could be that such holy ground could ever be peopled by unholy people, as it is written that this land shall be given to the righteous servants of the Lord. "If ever an ungodly people comes to possess that piece of earth," answered the Lord, "they shall not be allowed to live there in peace and I will send upon them calamity and disaster." According to a tradition the most pious people to ever have lived in the Holy Land came to settle in Jerusalem during the time of the Khalifa 'Umar. After the coming of the last prophet, the right to possession of the Holy Land passed on to the Muslims and only under Muslim rule can the curse of misfortune and disaster be averted.

67 – DĀ'ŪD'S TRIALS

IT IS RELATED that Dā'ūd ﷺ had 99 wives and concubines. Allah gave him such strength that he stayed with every one of them in the course of one night.

One day, Dā'ūd ﷺ fell down in his prayer-niche and prayed and wept for a long time. Then he raised his head and said, "O Lord, you have given excellence and the miracle power to the prophets who went before me. Ibrāhīm ﷺ, You honoured by making him Khalīl, Your beloved friend, and You made the fire cool and a safety for him and put down his enemy Nimrūd. You perfected Ya'qūb through his sons, and Mūsā ﷺ attained perfection in that You spoke to him making him Kalīmullāh. Hārūn ﷺ, You made perfect in knowledge, and to Ṣāliḥ ﷺ You granted Your Divine aid and helped him against his misguided people. O Lord, I ask You to give to me blessings by which I will be known and that distinguish me from my brother-proph-

ets." The Lord replied, "It is My special favour to you that I have never before created a prophet who is at one time king as well as My holy servant. As a miracle, I have made for you your gift of song. When you sing, the mountains resound in harmony and all of My creation stops to listen. The wild beasts are tamed by your song and the little birds fly upon your head and hand and have no fear of you. Also, I have made iron to melt in your hand as candle wax and soft as bread dough. Is this not a miracle given to you? And, O Dā'ūd, I have tried each of My prophets with a severe trial. Ibrāhīm, I tried with fire; when he was surrounded by Nimrūd's flames he complained to no-one and accepted My decree. Then I ordered him to sacrifice his son and he obeyed Me and laid him upon the sacrificial altar. Ya'qūb was tried by grief for his favourite son, Yūsuf and by his blindness; and I found him patient with My trial. Mūsā, I tried when he was only a small child and his mother was commanded to place him in a basket of rushes. She was patient and I gave him back to her breast. You, O Dā'ūd, have not yet seen My trials — I have made your life easy for you."

Dā'ūd ﷺ rubbed his forehead in the dust and prayed. "O Lord, this is my heart's desire: to be tried by You as you have tried the prophets who have gone before me so that I might attain some of the excellence You have bestowed upon them." The Lord answered, "O Dā'ūd, be ready then, for I shall indeed try you. I have heard your prayer. Your trial will come upon you without fail on such a day in such a month as I will mention to you. So prepare yourself for it."

The day came and Dā'ūd ﷺ went into his chamber and prayed for a long time in his niche. Then he raised his voice and recited from the Zabūr. As he was singing, Shayṭān entered the room in shape of a golden dove, his wings studded with pearls and precious gems. He flew around the room so that Dā'ūd ﷺ noticed him but he failed to recognize him. He admired the beauty and grace of that little golden bird and forgot the words of the Lord concerning the trial he was to meet on that appointed day. He wished to catch the bird in order to show it to his people so that they, too, could admire the won-

drous bird and praise the Creator who fashions every sort of thing, known, and unknown. But when Dā'ūd ﷺ streched out his hand to catch the bird, it flew off and settled on a spot just beyond Dā'ūd's reach. Dā'ūd ﷺ went after it and followed the bird in its path. The bird who was Shayṭān led him into a garden. In that garden, at that very moment, the wife of his commander, Uriah, was taking her bath. Dā'ūd's gaze fell upon the beautiful woman as she was bathing. He could not take his eyes off her, and the harm was done. So great was his desire for the woman who was another man's wife that he called for her husband Uriah and sent him off to the front-line of a battle against the Ammonites where the fighting was fierce, and Uriah fell there as a martyr. Dā'ūd ﷺ then married his widow, and she became the mother of Sulaymān ﷺ.

Some time after these events, two men came into Dā'ūd's sanctuary as he was praying there all alone. Dā'ūd ﷺ was afraid of them for he took them for intruders. As it is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Has the tiding of the dispute come to thee? When they scaled the Sanctuary when they entered upon Dā'ūd and he took fright at them and they said, 'Fear not, two disputants we are — one of us has injured the other; so judge between us justly and transgress not, and guide us to the right path.'*

'Behold, this my brother has ninety-nine ewes and I have one ewe. So he said, 'Give her into my charge,' and he overcame me in the argument. Said he, 'Assuredly he has wronged thee in asking for thy ewe in addition to his sheep. And indeed, many intermixers do injury one against the other, save those who believe and do deeds of righteousness — and how few they are!'" [Ṣād, 38:21–24]

Now the men who came into his presence were in reality angels, though Dā'ūd ﷺ knew them not. They revealed themselves to him and said, "O Dā'ūd, that man with the 99 sheep is yourself — for has not the Lord given to you 99 wives of your own? Why then did you desire to take the only wife of your loyal servant, Uriah, for yourself, and you sent him to his death so you could do it more easily?The Lord has seen all you have done, and know that you were being tested." Then Dā'ūd ﷺ re-

membered all the Lord had said to him and he fell down senseless upon his prayer mat and lifted not his head for forty days. He wept so long that grass began to grow where his tears had fallen and the tears' streaks caused scars upon his blessed face. All the birds and beasts who were his friends wept with him and the whole creation mourned. The angels went to their Lord and interceded on behalf of Dā'ūd ﷺ. The Lord said to them, "It is all right, for I am the Lord, the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful. The gate of repentance is open to all who sincerely intend to sin no more." Dā'ūd ﷺ cried to the Lord in his prostration, "O Lord, forgive me my sin, for I repent unto You ..."

"And Dā'ūd thought that We had only tried him; therefore he sought forgiveness of his Lord, and he fell down, bowing and he repented. Accordingly We forgave him that, and he has a near place in Our Presence and a fair resort.

'Dā'ūd, behold, We have appointed thee a viceroy in the earth; therefore judge between men justly and follow not caprice, lest it lead you astray from the way of Allah. Surely those who go astray from the way of Allah — there awaits them a terrible chastisement, for that they have forgotten the Day of Reckoning.'" [Ṣād, 38:24–26]

"O Lord," cried Dā'ūd ﷺ, "You are mighty and just and have the power to punish and to forgive. What shall I do on the Day of Judgment when I am faced with my servant Uriah and he speaks out against me?" Again Dā'ūd ﷺ fell down in prostration and wept for a long time. At last an angel of the Lord appeared before him and said, "The Lord says, 'On the Day of Judgment I will take Uriah aside and ask him to forgive you and to give to you his wife and to make her lawful to you. For that I shall open the gates of Paradise for him and he shall dwell there in bliss.'"

It is related from 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās ﷺ:

"When the two angels had gone from Dā'ūd ﷺ, he fell down and lifted not his head from the ground for forty days, and he neither ate nor slept, but begged only forgiveness from the Lord. He prayed, 'O Lord, You have created me and You have made Iblīs to be my enemy, and You have bestowed on me Your Favour. How shall I face You on the Day of Judgment?

I cannot bear even the heat of the sun, how then shall I bear the fires of hell? O my Lord, I cannot bear the sound of Your Divine Voice — how then shall I bear the roaring of hell-fire? O my Lord, You know what is manifest and what is hidden — forgive me, my Lord."

Dā'ūd ﷺ is also reported to have cried to the Lord:

"O Allah, You are the Possessor of all Majesty and Power, You do no injustice to anyone. Tell me now what I must do." The Lord answered Dā'ūd ﷺ and said, "Go to Uriah's grave. Ask his pardon and forgiveness for what you have done to him and ask also his permission for you to live with his wife lawfully. I shall make him hear you and you shall hear his answer." Dā'ūd ﷺ then went to the grave of Uriah and called to him, "O Uriah, do you hear me?" Uriah answered from his grave, 'Who is it who disturbs my peace and interrupts my enjoyments?" "It is I, Dā'ūd, a sinner," said Dā'ūd ﷺ. "O prophet of Allah, why do you come to me?" Dā'ūd ﷺ explained to him what he had done and how he had been the cause of his death. He asked for Uriah's forgiveness for having sent him to the frontline to fight ahead of the Holy Ark so that he might find death more certainly. Uriah answered, "I forgive you, O prophet of Allah, for by suffering this death I have been raised to the ranks of the holy martyrs."

Dā'ūd ﷺ returned and prayed again to the Lord. But the Lord said to him. "O Dā'ūd, do you not know that I am a king more perfect in justice than any? Go again to Uriah and say to him, 'I have taken your wife, Uriah, therefore, I had you killed. I ask you to make her lawful to me.' " Daud ﷺ returned to Uriah's grave and called to him. "Uriah!" he cried. Uriah answered him from his grave, "Who are you?" "I am Dā'ūd," said Dā'ūd. "Why have you come again. Have I not forgiven you the first time?" Dā'ūd confessed, "O Uriah, I desired to take your wife, and therefore I sent you into battle to have you slain." Uriah answered, "O Dā'ūd, is that proper conduct for a prophet of Allah? Verily, until the Day of Judgment I shall bear witness against you in the Presence of our Lord Allah Almighty!" Dā'ūd ﷺ fell upon his face and covered his head with

dust and remained there weeping for a very long time. At last a call from the Lord reached him and the Lord spoke, "O Dā'ūd, raise your head up and dry your tears for I have heard your prayers and forgiven you." Dā'ūd ﷺ said, "O my Lord, Uriah will not forgive me for the evil I have done by him! "The Lord said, "O Dā'ūd, I will say to Uriah on the Day of Judgment, 'If you do not forgive Dā'ūd the crime committed against you, I shall load it upon you, Uriah. Then he will readily forgive you." Dā'ūd ﷺ then said, "O Lord, now I know that You have truly annointed me."

After Dā'ūd ﷺ repented, he cried day and night for thirty years. At the time he took Uriah's wife he was seventy years old. After these events he divided up his time: one day he would concern himself with governing his state and ruling his kingdom; the next day, he would spend among his wives and families; on the third day he would go out into the fields and forests and weep under the open sky, and on the fourth day he would retreat into his sanctuary and retire from the world. There were 4000 prayer niches and 4000 anchorites in them, and they all would weep and pray with Dā'ūd ﷺ. On the days Dā'ūd ﷺ went out into the fields, all of nature wept with him and the beasts shed tears. Whenever Dā'ūd ﷺ ate or drank he wept and his tears ran in streams to the ground and the earth drank them.

It is reported that one day as Dā'ūd ﷺ was preaching to his people of the power and might of the Lord and of how He was to be feared, four hundred persons among his listeners surrendered their souls and died during his sermon.

Allah Almighty had taught Dā'ūd ﷺ the skill of making coats of mail with his bare hands. He made one such shirt a day and sold it for six thousand dirham. Two thousand dirham he spent on the needs of his families and for what he himself required. Four thousand dirham he gave to the poor among the Banī Isrā'īl.

68 – DĀ'ŪD'S ﷺ CONVERSATION WITH THE LORD

"O LORD, what is the reward for one who goes to visit the sick?"— "The angels of heaven ask for his forgiveness."

"O Lord, what is the reward for one who washes the dead?" — "I shall make him as pure as a new-born baby."

"O Lord, what is Your reward for one who wraps a dead person in his shroud?"— "I shall clothe him in the silk and brocade of the paradise garments."

"O Lord, how do You reward a person who prays over the dead?" — "The angels give him their *salāms* and pray for his soul."

"O Lord, what of a person who goes to console another in his grief?" — "I will clothe him in the garment of piety and faith."

"O Lord, what of a person who weeps from his fear of You?" — "I will make him secure from the terrors of hell."

"O Lord, if a person suffers calamity and he shows patience in the face of disaster, what shall be his final reward?" — "I shall elevate him to high stations."

"O Lord, what of a person who goes out in the dark of night to pray in the mosque?" — "On the Last Day, I shall give him a light by which he shall find his way safely."

"O Lord, if a person is angered against another, and it is within his power to seek revenge and yet he forgoes it, what shall be his reward?" — "I will fill his heart with faith and mercy and give him certainty."

"O Lord, if a person suffers injustice and forgives his tormentor in spite of his cruelty, what shall be his reward?" — "On the Last Day, I will give him honour and serenity."

"O Lord, what of a person who clears the road and makes it smooth for those who travel on it?" — "I will release as many of his friends and relations from the torments of hell as the number of stone and thorns he picked up from the way, for his sake."

"O Lord, how do You reward a person who calls an unbeliever to faith?" — "I will have mercy on him and show him familiarity."

"O Lord, what is Your reward for a person who does good by his father and mother?" — "I shall protect that person from the punishment of hell, and he will be satisfied by his station in paradise."

"O Lord, what is the punishment of one who disobeys his father and mother?" — "His punishment will be hell-fire."

"O Lord, what of one who is separated from his family and the bonds of kinship and makes repairs and returns to them?" — "I will make his life long and prosperous."

"O Lord, how do You reward one who remembers You much with his heart and his tongue?" — "On the Day of Judgment he will find Me and be brought close to Me."

"O Lord, if a person commits a sin and repents with all his heart?" — "His sin is then forgiven."

"O Lord, if a person sins and does not repent, what is his punishment?" — "However much he calls on Me, I do not answer him and I show him no mercy, nor will he attain what he desires."

"O Lord, if a person lives on usury, how is he punished?" — "On the Day of Judgment, he will be made to eat of the fruit of the Zakkūm tree, a tree in hell."

"O Lord, if a person lets his eye rove and looks at what is forbidden to him and does not avert his gaze even when he realizes this, what will his punishment be?" — "Even if he is a saint, I will cause his eye to weep."

"O Lord, if a person leaves his property in another's trust and departs on a journey and then, upon his return he receives back his property undamaged and undiminished, what is the reward of the person who took on the trust?" — "He will be made safe from My wrath."

"O Lord, if a person takes care not to transgress and keeps the company of the pious and God-fearing, what will be his reward?" — "He will be made safe from My punishment on the Day of Reckoning, and I shall raise him up in the company of My Messenger and saints."

"O Lord, if a person fasts and suffers greatly from thirst during the heat of the day, what will be his reward?" — "On the Day of Judgment he will know no thirst."

"O Lord, if a person, during his lifetime, repeats the words, *Lā ilāha illā llāh*, what will he find?" — "I will reward him with such bounty as his eye cannot encompass."

"O Lord, which of Your servants do You call miserly?" — "O Dā'ūd, it is the man who does not give *salāms*, greetings of peace to people."

"And which of Your servants is most beloved to You?" — "It is he who is humble for My sake."

"O Lord, how do You reward one who believes in Your Unity and associates no partners unto You?" — "I will save him from hellfire."

"O Lord, which of Your servants is truly weak?" — "It is he who does not ask of Me and of My endless bounties."

"And which of Your servants will You surely punish?" — "The servant who is not pleased by My Decree."

"O Lord, which of Your servants is a clever one?" — "The servant who decides a matter according to My truth, not his own opinion."

"And which of your servants can be called wise?" — "A person, who, however great his knowledge always seeks to know and to learn more."

Then Dā'ūd ﷺ said, "O Lord, forgive me my sins, for the sake of Your Prophets, Ibrāhīm and Isḥāq and Ya'qūb, and make my prayer acceptable to You and show me mercy."

The Lord spoke, "O Dā'ūd, I created Ādam with My Hand, and I blew into him a soul from My Breath of Life; I made the angels bow down before him in Paradise and I clothed him in the raiment of faith and set upon his head the crown of dignity. When he complained to Me of his loneliness I created Ḥawwā' for him to be his wife and companion. After all that, he was faithless and disobedient to Me so I drove him out of paradise. O Dā'ūd, behold the truth. If you listen to Me and obey, I shall listen to you also when you desire a thing, and when you are in need, I shall give you safety, and when you repent, I shall grant you forgiveness."

From KA'B AL-AḤBĀR:

The Lord said to Dā'ūd ﷺ, "O Dā'ūd, give good tidings to the sinners and warn the righteous to fear Me." Dā'ūd ﷺ asked, "What are the good tidings for the sinners and what is the warning to the righteous?"

The Lord answered, "Tell the sinners to repent and not to give up hope in Me and tell the righteous not to take pride in their righteousness. O Dā'ūd, I have barred the unrighteous from remembrance of My Holy Name, and I do not let them come to My house of worship, for whoever remembers Me, I remember him. But when the unjust remember Me, I curse them and My mercy is not sent upon them. I accept him who obeys Me and I love him who loves Me. Whoever wishes to know Me and makes it his intention to come to Me will find Me. If he desires to find Me, let him leave behind the urgings of his lower soul. A person who worships for the sake of attaining the bliss of paradise has wronged his own soul, for his worship was not for My sake alone. I love him who loves Me and I have chosen him who chooses Me. O Dā'ūd, I have created the clay of which were made the prophets, Ibrāhīm and Mūsā and Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ, and I created from My Light their hearts which were filled with longing. If your longing for Me is true then make it your quest and cut yourself off from everything other than Me, and desire nothing else but My Love, for it is a spiritual treasure. When love for Me fills your heart, all else will leave it, for love of Me and love of worldliness are never found together in one heart. My remembrance, *dhikr* is for those who remember Me, and My Paradise is for those who obey Me. To remember Me much is reserved for the lovers of Allah, and I Myself am for those who love Me. And whoever loves one who loves Me, he too is close to Me."

It is related by ABŪ ṬĀLIB AL-MAKKĪ:

The Lord spoke to Dā'ūd ﷺ, "Why do you desire Paradise and forget Me?" — "Who are Your lovers?" asked Dā'ūd ﷺ. "My lovers," answered the Lord, "are those whose hearts have become purified from all contamination and have been burnt out for love of Me. With My Hand of Power I give them what-

ever they desire. I have created the hearts of My lovers for My own pleasure and I have cut them off from all but Myself alone."

'ABDULLĀH IBN 'ABBĀS ﷺ relates:

Once Dā'ūd ﷺ asked of the Lord, "Who is safe from Your mighty Hand, O Lord?" Allah Almighty answered, "He who assumes humility in the face of My Majesty and who leaves off his evil desires for My sake. He who feeds the hungry and clothes the needy for My sake, who welcomes the stranger and makes him his guest, and he who gives protection and safety to those who have suffered cruelty and injustice for My sake."

One day Dā'ūd ﷺ entered the house of worship, his head held high and his arms swinging freely. The Lord addressed him and said, "O Dā'ūd, where are you going with that proud, swinging gait?" From that time on Dā'ūd ﷺ always went out leaning upon a staff, from fear of the Almighty Lord.

Dā'ūd ﷺ said, "O Lord, every king has a treasure house, what then is the store of Your treasures?" Allah answered him, "My treasure house is higher than the Lofty Throne and wider than the Divine Court. It is more lavishly decorated than all the heavenly mansions with their immeasurable opulence." Dā'ūd ﷺ said, "Where can this endless store of Your treasures be found, O my lord?" The Lord answered, "My treasure house is in the breast of the broken-hearted."

The Lord said to Dā'ūd ﷺ, "O Dā'ūd, be the enemy of your nafs, your lower soul, and become My friend. If you give your love to Me, I will send My Love to you. O Dā'ūd, rejoice in the mention of My Holy Name and be content with Me. O Dā'ūd, if a person were to live only for four hours, this is how he should spend his time: one hour in worship and supplication; one hour in fighting his nafs and seeking to conquer his lower inclinations; one hour he should spend visiting his friends, and one hour in spending of his lawful earnings."

Dā'ūd ﷺ asked the Lord to show him the mīzān, the scales of balance on the Day of Judgment. Allah gave him the vision of the mīzān and Dā'ūd ﷺ fell down senseless and fainted. When he came to his senses he wept and asked the Lord, "O my Lord,

who would be able to fill the scales of that balance with his good deeds? "O Dā'ūd," answered the Lord, "if I am pleased with My servant, I cause the scale of his good deeds to sink, even if it contains no more than a date-stone."

Dā'ūd ﷺ then asked to see the Bridge of *ṣirāṭ*. When he was shown the vision, again he fainted. When he recovered his senses he asked, "Who might be capable of passing over that bridge in safety?" The Lord answered him, "O Dā'ūd, if a person just once in his life says with full conviction and sincerity of heart: *lā ilāha illā llāh, Muḥammadu r-rasūlullāh*, he will pass over the Bridge of *ṣirāṭ* with lightning speed."

There lived a learned man in Israel at the time who possessed eighty chests full of books. The Lord said to Dā'ūd ﷺ, "Go tell that scholar that all his books, and even if he had thrice as many, will not profit him if he is deficient in three things: if he has no love for his Muslim brothers then he is not one of them; secondly, Shayṭān should not be a partner in his knowledge, for Shayṭān is no friend of the Muslims; and lastly, he should not seek to harm the Muslims, for that is not a Muslim deed."

69 – DĀ'ŪD'S ﷺ DEATH AND HIS SUCCESSOR

ALLAH ALMIGHTY ﷻ had decreed that the kingship over Israel should remain in the house of Dā'ūd ﷺ and He promised Dā'ūd ﷺ that He would give him a son to succeed him. Now Dā'ūd ﷺ had nineteen sons, one of them being Sulaymān ﷺ. Dā'ūd feared that there might be disagreement about the succession to the throne after his death, and he prayed to the Lord for guidance. Jibrā'īl ﷺ was sent and said to Dā'ūd ﷺ, "Tell all your sons to write their names in sand and ask each to plant his staff beside his name. Let this be done in a closed room which is kept locked. You and everyone with you will know who is to be your successor by a sure sign; one of the staffs will have spouted by the morning. So let your heart be calm and do as the Lord commands you." Dā'ūd ﷺ called his sons and had them do as the Lord had said. In the morning, they went to look and found

the staff of Sulaymān ﷺ grown as high as the ceiling, sprouting forth green leaves and branches. So it was known beyond doubt that Sulaymān ﷺ was to be king after Dā'ūd ﷺ.

According to another narration the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to Dā'ūd ﷺ when Sulaymān ﷺ was twenty years of age with a golden page in his hand, which, he handed to Dā'ūd ﷺ, saying, "*Salāms* from the Lord Almighty to you, Dā'ūd. You shall read all the questions on this golden sheet to your assembled sons and he who answers them all shall be your successor." Dā'ūd ﷺ read them to his sons and only Sulaymān ﷺ knew how to answer them. Thus it was known that he would become Dā'ūd's successor.

The Lord said to Dā'ūd ﷺ about his son Sulaymān ﷺ, "Of all the ninety portions of wisdom present on earth, I shall give seventy to your son Sulaymān ﷺ and twenty to all the other kings who are to follow him." Then Dā'ūd ﷺ said to his son Sulaymān ﷺ, "O my son, I leave you three pieces of advice: do not rely on what you have not yet attained; be pleased with whatever the Lord gives to you; and be patient with your loss when the Lord takes from you."

One day when Dā'ūd ﷺ returned to his mosque, he found an unknown man sitting at the gates. "Who are you?" he asked him. "I am he from whose hand none can escape," said that person. Dā'ūd ﷺ knew from his reply that he must be the Angel of Death. Now Dā'ūd ﷺ had a special high place upon which he was accustomed to pray, and he prayed there. Then he said to the angel, "Give me leave to descend from here," but the angel did not wait, and he took his soul atop of his minbar. His attendants carried him down and Sulaymān ﷺ washed his father's body. Forty-thousand people came to Dā'ūd's ﷺ funeral, and they buried him in his own city, Jerusalem. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said, "Dā'ūd ﷺ lived for 100 years, and he left this world on a Saturday."

Peace be upon him and upon all the prophets, Amīn.

70 — SULAYMĀN عليه السلام

IT IS RELATED by WAHB IBN AL-MUNABBIH that when the Angel of Death retrieved the soul of King Dā'ūd, Jibrā'īl عليه السلام came to Sulaymān عليه السلام his son, to offer his condolences. He said to him, "The Lord has made you your father's successor and king of all Israel." Sulaymān understood then that his father had died. He went to Dā'ūd's place of prayer and found his body there. He placed the king's turban upon his head, took the staff of Mūsā عليه السلام in one hand and the banner of Yūsuf in the other and stood in front of the Holy Ark. The angel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام came to him and said, "The Lord Almighty sends you *salāms* and He asks of you: what do you value the most, the kingship or knowledge?" Sulaymān fell down and prostrated before the Lord. Then he said, "O my Lord, I would much rather have knowledge from You than kingship!" The Lord loves those who show humility before Him and He was pleased with Sulaymān. "As you have preferred knowledge," spoke the Lord, "I will give you knowledge as well as kingship. I give you a sound mind and blameless character. I will remove from you vain pride and I give the world into your hands. Travel its width and marvel at the wonders which I have created therein." Again Sulaymān عليه السلام prostrated before the Lord and he did not lift his head until it was evening. The Lord said to Jibrā'īl عليه السلام, "Go to the heavens and bring the Ring of Might and give it to Sulaymān." Jibrā'īl عليه السلام flew straight to heaven and got the ring. A sweet fragrance issued from it and it shone as brilliantly as a star. It was set in a square and there were certain words written in each of its corners: "*lā ilāha illā llāh, Muḥammadu r-rasūlullāh*" in the first corner; "*lā ilāha illā llāh*, everything perishes but His Countenace, His is the verdict and to Him you shall return" in the second corner; "His is the Sovereignty and Majesty, His the Might and the Power" in

the third; and "Blessed be Allah, the Supreme Creator" in the fourth corner.

This ring was Ādam's ﷺ ring which he wore when he dwelt in Paradise. When he fell from his station, the ring slipped off his finger during his fall to earth and was lost to him. It fell near one of the pillars of the Throne. The Lord spoke to it and said, "O Ring of Might, as Ādam has been heedless of his pact with Me, We will give you to one of his descendants who will keep his word." The ring remained in the heavens until the day Jibrā'īl ﷺ was ordered to give it to Sulaymān ﷺ. This day was a Friday and it was the Day of 'Ashūra, the tenth of Muharram. Sulaymān ﷺ slipped the ring upon his finger and Jibrā'īl ﷺ revealed to him the *basmala*. The winds and the Jinn were made subservient to him, as it is written:

"And to Sulaymān the wind, strongly blowing that ran at his command unto the land that We had blessed; and We had knowledge of everything; and of the Satans some dived for him and did other work besides and We were watching over them." [The Prophets, 21:80–81]

Allah Almighty also taught Sulaymān ﷺ the tongue of the birds:

"And Sulaymān was Dā'ūd's heir and he said, 'Men, we have been taught the speech of the birds and we have been given of everything. Surely this is indeed the manifest bounty.'" [The Ant, 27:16]

One morning the quail raised its voice and Sulaymān ﷺ said to his followers, "Do you not hear what it is saying? It says, 'Oh heedless ones, remember your Lord!'" When the nightingale sang, Sulaymān ﷺ interpreted its song, "The nightingale says, 'I have tasted of this world but half a date ...'" Then the peacock screeched and Sulaymān ﷺ translated its speech, "It says, 'How ever much you ask to be spared, in the end you will die.'" The hoopoe bird called, and Sulaymān ﷺ understood its words; it was saying, "Whoever takes no pity on Allah's creation shall find no pity himself."

Then the parrot cried, "Whoever works good deeds will receive goodness in return." The the owl then spoke and said, "If only these people had never been created ..." and the dove said, "Praised be the Lord Almighty!" The raven cawed, "He

who remained silent was saved from foolishness." The eagle screeched, "Whatever I may wish for, death will put an end to it all." King Sulaymān ﷺ understood their speech and translated its meaning for his people.

Sulaymān's mother was Bathsheba and he was born in Jerusalem. He lived only for fifty-three or fifty-five years, though some sources say sixty. He was of fair complexion and quite tall, had a thick beard and hair on his body. He preferred to dress in white. According to the custom of the times, he married many women, among them Pharaoh's daughter and many other princesses. He was also extremely fond of fine horses and he kept a great many in his stables. One afternoon he was watching his horses being led in parade. He was so enraptured by their beauty that the time of the afternoon prayer slipped by and it was evening before Sulaymān ﷺ looked up. He felt great remorse at having let himself be distracted from his worship for love of the world and ordered all his beautiful horses to be killed.

"And We gave unto Dā'ūd Sulaymān; how excellent a servant he was! He was penitent. When in the evening were presented to him the standing steeds, he said, 'Lo, I have loved the love of good things better than the remembrance of my Lord, until the sun was hidden behind the veil. Return them to me!' And he began to stroke their shanks and necks." [Ṣād, 38:29–30]

Sayyidinā 'Alī ﷺ related that Allah ordered the angel of the sun to bring the sun up again so that Sulaymān ﷺ could complete his prayer before sunset and the sun was brought up again after it had already gone down.

When his prophethood was revealed to him, the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came and said to Sulaymān ﷺ, "O prophet of Allah! You are now a prophet as well as king. These people are entrusted to your care in worldly as well as spiritual respect. You must take great care in looking after them. Neglect not one of your subjects. For example, I will tell you now that not very far from here, there lives a poor widow with her two small children. Go to her but and see to her needs." Sulaymān ﷺ went from his palace to the woman's and he took the shortest route.

He found the woman and her children living in great poverty. There was nothing in the hut but an old mat woven of palm fronds and a sackcloth bag stuffed with palm fibre to make a pillow. That, along with one or two earthenware vessels was all they possessed. Sulaymān ﷺ met the woman and saw that she was dressed in rags and that her hands were cut and bleeding. He greeted her, then he inquired about her state of affairs. "Is this all you possess?" he asked. "Yes," replied the woman, "this is all we own in the world." "What has happened to your husband?" asked the king. "My husband died in battle as a martyr, may Allah have mercy on him," she answered. "Have you no relatives then, brothers, cousins or in-laws to look after you?" "I have no one but Allah," said she, "I am a stranger here, myself and my two daughters." Then Sulaymān ﷺ asked about her hands and learnt that at night she bedded her children on her hands and arms so that they should not be hurt by the roughness of the mat. Sulaymān ﷺ then said, "You are yet youthful. It is only right and proper that you should be wed to a worthy man who will look after you and your daughters, according to Allah Almighty's command. Then you will have some protection." "I ask whatever I need from the Lord alone," answered the woman, "and I am afraid of remarrying, for who knows how a stepfather will treat my children. It is enough that their father left them orphaned; should they lose their mother as well?" Sulaymān ﷺ returned to his palace and prayed to the Lord.

"*He said, 'My Lord, forgive me and give me a kingdom such as may not befall anyone after me. Surely Thou art the All-Giver.'*" [Ṣād, 38:34]

"I am poor myself," prayed Sulaymān ﷺ, "how shall I look after the needs of the poor?" The angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to him and said, "'I have given you power and kingdom,' says the Lord,'" and that night, by the Grace of Allah, Sulaymān ﷺ was given power over the worlds above and below and he commanded the Jinn, as it is written,

"*So We subjected to him the wind that ran at his commandment softly, wherever he might light on, and the Satans, every builder and diver*

and others also, coupled in fetters: 'This is Our gift: bestow or withhold without reckoning.' And he had a near place in Our presence and a fair resort." [Ṣād, 38:35]

Sulaymān ﷺ commanded the Jinn to dig and burrow for gold and precious stones and by the morning he had a great treasure before him. He took none for himself but loaded it all onto a mule caravan and sent it by road to the house of the poor widow, while he himself took the short route which he knew. Sulaymān ﷺ reached the hut before the bearers of the treasure did, and he found it crowded full of people this morning. A curtain had been hung up in the room, partitioning off a section for the women, and behind it sat the poor woman while her children played outside. Sulaymān ﷺ asked and was told that after the king's visit the woman had finally consented to marry and that a certain man had long been asking for her hand in marriage. They had come together to contract the marriage that very day. Sulaymān ﷺ sat down in the assembly and was silent. The children came in, looking for their mother and not finding her among the men, lifted a corner of the curtain and ran to their mother. They saw that she was wearing a beautiful new dress and asked her, "O mother, from where did you get that beautiful new dress? Why are you all dressed up? And why have so many people come to see us today?" Their mother embraced and fondled them and said, "O my beloved children, our lives are going to change today. You will also have nice, new clothes to put on, and our life of misery and poverty will be over. We shall live decently like everybody else. Your new father will look after us." As young as they were, the girls instantly understood that their mother was planning to get married, and they tore themselves loose and ran out. Outside they fell into each other's arms and began to weep and cry in a most forlorn manner. "In the whole world we had only our dear mother and now she is being taken from us and given to someone else. She will now sleep in another bed and we have only each other. What is to become of us?" And they cried so hard and sobbed so much that it rent the hearts of all who heard them. Their mother also wept and Sulaymān ﷺ

was moved to tears and the whole gathering suddenly looked unhappy. Then, behind her curtain, their mother quietly took off her nice new dress and said to the man who hoped to marry her, "Take back your nice presents, there will be no wedding today, for I cannot bear to see those children crying. I cannot be responsible for their misery. The All-Merciful Lord who has kept us alive will give us our provision as He has done so far. I will not be parted from my children." With that the matter was settled and everyone left the hut except the king, Sulaymān ﷺ. The woman said to him, "Now you have seen, it is impossible for me to break my children's hearts for the sake of a piece of bread." Just then the mule train arrived and Sulaymān ﷺ said, "See here, good woman, what the Lord has sent you." All the bags of gold and jewels were brought in and dumped in a corner of the hut. Sulaymān ﷺ said to her, "All this gold and these priceless jewels are now yours. Use them as you see fit and bring up your daughters as you wish. This is a gift from the Lord Almighty Allah." With that he rose up to go.

Now the building of the temple had been begun under Dā'ūd ﷺ but he could not complete it. Sulaymān ﷺ was ordered to accomplish this task. The poor widow vowed that she would donate the treasure towards the construction of the temple after she had taken what she needed and given plentifully to other poor people. This was the wisdom behind the immense treasure that was given to Sulaymān ﷺ in that night.

It is related that one day, prophet Sulaymān ﷺ was travelling by the wind and passed over the Ka'ba which, at that time, was full of pagan idols. It was revealed to him that the prophet of the Last Times would arise in this place and Sulaymān ﷺ saluted the Ka'ba, but he did not alight there. The Ka'ba itself wept when the prophet Sulaymān ﷺ flew by and did not visit it. The Lord spoke to it, "Why are you weeping?" "Should I not weep," said the Ka'ba, "when Your prophet Sulaymān ﷺ flies by overhead and does not stop to pray here or visit me?" The Lord then spoke, "Dry your tears, for I will send a prophet to you in the Last Times. Untold millions will then come to you and pray towards you from all directions, for I will make you

the *qibla* of the world. I will cleanse you of all idols and the filth of Shayṭān. I will make you the centre of the holy rites. All the world will then yearn to see you."

One of the Prophet's companions relates, "The Lord has spoken in the Holy Qur'ān,

"*Certainly We tried Sulaymān, and We cast upon his throne a mere body; then he repented. He said. 'My Lord, forgive me!'*" [Ṣād, 38:32]

The trial of Sulaymān ﷺ was this: One day, a son was born to the king. The Jinn who were subjugated by Sulaymān ﷺ and made to work for him, said among themselves, "If this child lives and succeeds his father to the throne, we will never be free of this bondage and forced labour. It is best we kill the baby, or at least drive him mad." The wind brought news of this talk to the prophet and Sulaymān ﷺ ordered the wind to enfold the child in his breath and carry him up to the clouds and hide him there. The wind obeyed and hid him there, but one day the child fell off the cloud and was killed. He fell right upon his father's throne. Sulaymān ﷺ then realised his fault; his trust in Allah had been deficient when he believed he could hide the child in a cloud. He wept and prayed for forgiveness and for three days did not appear in his court. The Lord then reproached him for this also, saying, "You have neglected the affairs of My servants in your excessive grief over the death of your baby son."

Another version of this story has also been related:

One day Sulaymān's son fell seriously ill. Having no other son, Sulaymān ﷺ became sick with grief. Two persons appeared before him and one of them said to the king, "This man has trampled through my fields and destroyed my grain." Sulaymān asked the accused man, "Why did you walk through your neighbour's field and make his crop wither?" The man replied, "I had no choice but to step on it, for he had sown his grain in the middle of the road." Sulaymān ﷺ then said to the first man, "Why did you sow in the middle of the road? Do you not know that travellers have the right of way on a public road?" The man answered Sulaymān ﷺ, "Why then did you sire a son — did you not know that he was on the road to death

as soon as he was born? All people are on the road to death." With that both men disappeared and Sulaymān ﷺ knew they had been angels sent to teach him a lesson. He fell down and prayed for forgiveness.

Though Sulaymān ﷺ was king over all Israel, he practised a trade to earn his livelihood. He wove baskets and sold them in the market for two dinar each. He fed the poor and sat and ate with them, for he said that the poor man sits with the poor. He wore plain white robes and was modest in his bearing.

71 — SULAYMĀN'S TRIALS

SULAYMĀN ﷺ MARRIED many women, among them some foreign princesses. One of these was the daughter of the lord of Sidon whom he had defeated in battle. This princess grieved very much for her father and she asked Sulaymān ﷺ to have a statue fashioned in her father's image to remember him by. Sulaymān ﷺ loved this wife and gave the task to the artisans among the Jinn. They made a statue, and because it was the work of Jinn the image resembled the dead man so perfectly it was nearly impossible to tell that it was made of stone. Everyone admired the work and secretly the princess began to worship it, as some people worship their ancestors.

King Sulaymān ﷺ had a wise vizier by the name of Asaf. One day, this vizier called for a general meeting to be held, and Asaf stood up and addressed the assembly. He recounted many events from the lives of the prophets, from the time of Ādam ﷺ onwards, and he described in great detail their deeds and the excellence of their characters. He finally made mention of their present prophet-king Sulaymān ﷺ, who was also present at the gathering. He said, "When he was very young, Sulaymān ﷺ attained a very elevated state of illumination ..." but he made no mention of his later life. Afterwards, Sulaymān ﷺ asked him why he had spoken thus about him, as if he considered him to have now fallen from his station. Asaf replied, "Truly, your condition then was better than it is now. For it has become

known to me that for forty days now idols are being worshipped under your roof."

Sulaymān ﷺ was ignorant of this fact and the Lord addressed him and reproached him for his negligence. "O Sulaymān," Spoke the Lord, "who gave you permission to take wives from among the idolaters and to take them into our house? Be prepared for disaster to come upon your head!"

One of Sulaymān's ﷺ wives was named Āmina. Whenever Sulaymān ﷺ went to perform his ablution he would take off his ring with the holy seal and, saying, '*Bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*', he would hand it to his wife who held it for him until he had completed his ablutions. One day, one of the lords of the Jinn saw his chance and he decided to take the ring from Sulaymān ﷺ by some means. It was the very day Allah had reproached Sulaymān ﷺ for harbouring an idol-worshipping wife in his house. That day, Sulaymān ﷺ forgot to say the *basmala* before he took off his ring. This was enough for the Jinn whose name was Sākhir to enter. He assumed Sulaymān's form (for the Jinn have been granted that power by the Grace of Allah Almighty) and went up to Āmina who was holding the ring and asked her for it. Thinking it was Sulaymān ﷺ before her, she gave him the ring without a moment's hesitation. The Jinn Sākhir went straight to Sulaymān's throne and occupied his place there. When the true Sulaymān ﷺ came out from performing his ablutions and asked his wife Āmina for his ring, she cried, "I have given the ring to Sulaymān ﷺ. Who are you, impostor?" She called at once for the palace guard who threw Sulaymān ﷺ out of his palace, leaving the false pretender to impersonate him for forty days. During that time Sākhir the Jinn did his best to corrupt and undo all the good that Sulaymān ﷺ had done. He signed orders and issued decrees, making lawful what is forbidden and he taught the practice of the black arts and spread all manner of evil.

Sulaymān ﷺ wandered the world alone as a beggar and he was hungry and humiliated. At last he reached the seashore and met some fishermen. He said to them. "I am Sulaymān, your prophet-king," but the fishermen took a stick and beat

him, exclaiming, "How dare you claim to be Sulaymān ﷺ, the great and wise? You are a liar!" Sulaymān ﷺ was at a complete loss of what to do, and he wept long and hard. The angels in heaven wept with him. At long last he suggested to the fisherman that they should let him help them with their work, and for forty days Sulaymān ﷺ went out fishing with them. He received two fish each day for his labour, one of which he would eat himself and the other he gave away in charity.

The Jinn on Sulaymān's throne ruled for forty days. Sulaymān's vizier Asaf by then had realised that something was very wrong, for the king was perpetrating all sorts of evil. Asaf knew also of the Jinn Sākhir's enmity. He guessed the truth, exposed the impostor and ordered him to be removed from the throne. But the Jinn was quicker and flew away and from the heights of the ramparts he dropped the ring into the sea. It sank in the sea, and by the supreme wisdom of Allah Almighty, a fish swam along and swallowed it. That day this fish went into the fishermen's nets, and when Sulaymān ﷺ was given his daily portion of two fish, he found in the belly of the fish which he had kept for himself his very own ring! He slipped it on and in great joy and gratitude returned to his palace and resumed his rule.

72 — BUILDING THE TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM

DĀ'ŪD ﷺ HAD ALREADY INTENDED to build the holy temple at Jerusalem, but his son Sulaymān ﷺ was destined to complete it. Since the time of Mūsā ﷺ, the direction of Jerusalem had been the *qibla*, for the angels had shown him special lights emanating from that direction. Every attempt Dā'ūd ﷺ made to construct a temple failed, and every building he erected there crumbled. Dā'ūd ﷺ complained of this to Allah Almighty, and Allah answered him, "He who has spilt the blood of My servants is not destined to build My temple." Dā'ūd ﷺ rejoined, "O Lord, I fought only in the *jihād* as You commanded me, and the blood I spilt was the blood of unbelievers." "Yes," said the Lord, "they were unbelievers and it was holy war, but were

they not My servants nonetheless?" Dā'ūd ﷺ understood and was told that his son Sulaymān ﷺ would build the temple of the Lord.

After Dā'ūd ﷺ had passed away, Sulaymān ﷺ received the order to begin with the construction. Sulaymān ﷺ pressed into service the hosts of Jinn at his command, and a great number of architects and workmen from all parts of the world. The Jinn were sent to fetch the marble and alabaster out of which the walls were to be built. Another group was sent to mine gold and silver and other precious materials from the depths of the earth. Yet others dived down into the sea to fetch up pearls and corals, and there were others still who brought amber and musk and costly incense. They worked day and night at the task and when the temple was completed, it shone like the Pole Star. Never has there been such a magnificent temple of worship on earth and there was a great feast to celebrate its completion.

'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās ﷺ relates that an angel was appointed to oversee the Jinn at their work. He held a whip in his hand and flogged the Jinn who were disobedient or lazy.

Sulaymān ﷺ asked three things of the Lord and the Lord granted him his wishes: firstly, he asked for wisdom; secondly, he asked for a kingdom such as would never be given to another king on earth; lastly, he asked that whoever prays two *rak'ats* in the holy mosque at Jerusalem might be forgiven for his sins.

73 – SULAYMĀN ﷺ AND BILQĪS, THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

When the temple was completed, Sulaymān ﷺ went to perform a pilgrimage at Mecca to glorify the Lord. He sacrificed five thousand camels and five thousand oxen and twenty-thousand sheep. Then he mounted on his flying carpet, which the Jinn had woven for him and flew towards Yemen. He was accompanied by his flock of birds, among them the hoopoe bird. At Ṣan'ā', the capital of Yemen where Sulay-

mān ﷺ had stopped to rest and to pray, Sulaymān's hoopoe bird met another hoopoe whose name was Ayfel. They kept each other company and the hoopoe Ayfel described at great length to Sulaymān's hoopoe bird the wonders of the kingdom of Ṣan'ā'. They flew off together so that Ayfel might show him what he had described, and so it happened that King Sulaymān ﷺ departed on his carpet and returned to Jerusalem without his hoopoe bird. Sulaymān ﷺ noticed that the hoopoe bird was not with him and asked for him. At last the bird came flying home and it rubbed its head and its wings in the dust at the king's feet, begging Sulaymān's pardon. Sulaymān ﷺ grabbed the bird and shook it, but the hoopoe said, "O my king, there will surely come a day when you too will have to stand before the Presence of your Lord awaiting judgment." Upon these words, Sulaymān ﷺ forgave him.

"*And he reviewed the birds. Then he said, 'How is it with me, that I do not see the hoopoe? Or is he among the absent? Assuredly I will chastise him with a terrible chastisement or I will slaughter him or he bring me a clear authority.'*

But he tarried not long and said, 'I have comprehended that which thou hast not comprehended and I have come from Sheba to thee with a sure tiding. I found a woman ruling over them and she has been given of everything and she possesses a mighty throne. I found her and her people prostrating to the sun apart from Allah. Satan has decked out fair their deeds to them and he has barred them from the way, and therefore they are not guided, so that they prostrate not themselves to Allah, who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and earth; and He knows what you conceal and what you publish. Allah: there is no god but He, the Lord of the Mighty Throne.'" [The Ant, 27:20–26]

The hoopoe bird told his king all he had seen in the kingdom of Ṣan'ā' and how the queen, Bilqīs and her subjects adored the sun instead of Allah Almighty. "We shall see if you have spoken the truth," said Sulaymān ﷺ, "and if you have lied, I will punish you harshly." Sulaymān ﷺ was asked how he would punish the hoopoe, and Sulaymān ﷺ replied, "I would place him among a flock of foreign birds other than his own kind, so that he could not understand them, nor should they understand

him. That punishment would be more grievous to him than death." But Sulaymān ﷺ wisely forgave the hoopoe bird.

Some time passed and the king had not called or asked for the hoopoe bird. The hoopoe grew very sad for having been deprived of the king's company. He confided his grief to his friend, the turtle dove. The dove told his friend not to worry. He would take care of the matter. Then he flew off to the king's private gardens, where, Sulaymān ﷺ was conversing with his vizier Asaf. When the dove had finished speaking, Sulaymān ﷺ said, "We shall see if he has spoken the truth. I will write a letter to the queen of Sheba, calling her to Islam and to put an end to their idol worship." "And who will deliver that letter?" Asaf enquired. For the inhabitants of that country were known for their ferocity. Sulaymān ﷺ called for the hoopoe. "You know the way into that country," he said, "go take this letter and deliver it and, we shall see what is their reply."

"*Said he, 'Now we will see whether thou halt spoken truly or whether thou art among those that lie. Take this letter of mine and cast it unto them. Then turn back from them and see what they shall return.'*" [The Ant, 27:27]

The hoopoe bird flew off with the letter, and on its way it had to pass by three hundred archers who aimed at it, but all of them missed their mark, and the hoopoe flew by unscathed. It never feared, for did the letter not begin "*Bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*, in the Name of Allah, the All-Compassionate, All-Merciful"? The hoopoe flew past all the queen's marksmen and landed on top of her palace. Now it happened to be a holiday and the queen was alone in her private apartments, resting. The hoopoe flew straight in through an open window — or perhaps it was broken — and dropped the letter upon her breast. Then he darted out again and flew homewards.

The queen awoke and found the letter which bore Sulaymān's ﷺ seal.

"*She said, 'O Council, see, a letter honourable has been cast unto me. It is from Sulaymān, and it is in the Name of Allah, the All-Compassionate, All-Merciful. Rise not up against me but come to me in surrender.' She said, 'O Council, pronounce to me concerning my affair.*

I am not used to decide an affair until you bear me witness.'" [The Ant, 27:30–33]

"I have received this letter from Sulaymān ﷺ," she told her advisors, "and it frightens me. It is very strongly worded and forceful. What do you advise?" "Our soldiers are many and our armies number many thousand men. If only you order it, we will go out to war against them." But Bilqīs replied, "O my counsellors and ministers, listen to me. If Sulaymān ﷺ falls upon this land, he will destroy all there is within it and leave not one of us alive."

"*She said, 'Kings when they enter a city, disorder it and make the mighty ones of its inhabitants abased, even so will they do. Now I will send them a present, and see what the envoys bring back.*'" [The Ant, 27:34]

Her advisors agreed with her for she was their queen and they could easily see that it would be to their advantage not to antagonize such a mighty king as Sulaymān ﷺ and to sweeten him with precious gifts. Perhaps they might even win him over to their beliefs and form of worship, they thought. So Bilqīs had a large caravan prepared and she loaded it with bricks of gold and jewels of untold value. She also sent some gifts which were intended to try Sulaymān to see if he as really as wise as she was told. There was a box which contained a pearl of majestic size which was pierced but the hole was so narrow, it was impossible to pass a cord through it. "Let him pass a string through this pearl, but neither man nor Jinn shall touch it." And she sent also another pearl, this one unpierced, and she asked Sulaymān to pierce it, but again not by the hand of man or Jinn. Then she sent five hundred boys and five hundred girls to him, who were all born in the same year, in the same month, on the same day, at the same hour, and they were all of equal stature and wearing identical clothes. Sulaymān ﷺ was asked to distinguish which of them were girls and which were boys. "If Sulaymān ﷺ is really a prophet, then he will knew the answer to these riddles and if he is only a king, it will just arouse his anger," said Bilqīs.

The hoopoe heard all these words and reported them to Sulaymān ﷺ. Sulaymān ﷺ ordered the Jinn to make bricks of

silver and gold and to tile a space of twenty square miles with them. Then he placed his throne on this square and lined up all the Jinn and Ifrits and monsters and dragons along the sides of the golden square and surrounded his throne with his counsellors and wisemen. The dragons and monsters defiled the silver- and gold-tiled space and had made it unrecognizable by the time the delegation from Ṣan'ā' arrived. They deposited their presents in one corner of the great square and came before the king, bowing low. Sulaymān ﷺ looked on them with a smiling mien, then he asked them, "So where is the pearl in the bottle?"

The envoys were much surprised at his knowledge of what had not yet been shown to him The ambassador brought the precious gifts and stated the conditions. Sulaymān ﷺ gave orders to the woodworm, and the woodworm heard and obeyed. It took a length of silk thread in its mouth and crept the crooked, narrow way through the pearl, bringing the thread out the other end. Then Sulaymān ﷺ ordered the woodpecker to bore a hole through the unpierced pearl and the bird did this perfectly. After this, Sulaymān ﷺ ordered for water to be brought and had all the girls and youths wash their hands and faces. He saw that some of them let the water fall on the backs of their hands while others cupped their hands to collect the water. The first group were the boys and the second the girls. Then Sulaymān ﷺ said to the envoys,

"*What, would you succour me with wealth, and what Allah gave me is better than what He has given you? Nay, but instead you rejoice in your gift! Return thou to them; we shall assuredly come against them with hosts they have not power to resist, and we shall expel them from there, abased and utterly humbled.*'" [The Ant, 27:37–38]

The envoys returned with the gifts Sulaymān ﷺ had rejected and told their queen what had occurred. She then said, "He is indeed a prophet and no ordinary king." Sulaymān ﷺ had also sent word to Bilqīs, inviting her to come to his court for he intended to marry her. Her maidens agreed that this was a very good plan, "for then you will rule over the whole of the land, from the Euphrates to the Nile," they said. They advised her to accept Sulaymān's ﷺ invitation and to show herself to him, for

she had no equal, no princess or slave-girl could match her beauty. But she was also proud, and planned to go only if she was accompanied by the whole of her army. Sulaymān ﷺ had written to her inviting her to the true religion, and saying that the only gift he would accept from her was her conversion to Islam.

Then Sulaymān ﷺ said to his attendants, "Who of you is able to bring me her throne before she arrives here?" One of the Ifrīt among the Jinn spoke up and said, "Surely I will bring it to you before you are able to rise from your place." But Sulaymān ﷺ said, "No, I want it here faster than that." Then Asaf, his trusted friend spoke and said, "I will bring it to you faster than your gaze returns to your eye," and he did so. In the Holy Qur'ān the story is told in these words:

"*He said, 'O Council, which one of you will bring me her throne before they come to me in surrender?' An Ifrīt of the Jinn said, 'I will bring it to thee, before thou risest from thy place. I have the strength for it and I am trustworthy.'*

Said he who possessed knowledge of the Book, 'I will bring it to thee before even thy glance returns to thee. Then, when he saw it settled before him, he said, 'This is of my Lord's bounty that He may try me, whether I am thankful or ungrateful. Whosoever gives thanks gives thanks only for his own soul's good and whosoever is ungrateful, my Lord is surely All-Sufficient All-Generous.'" [The Ant, 27:39–42]

Sulaymān ﷺ had been given power over all things on earth, yet it was his friend Asaf who brought him the throne of Bilqīs in less than the blinking of an eye. Some of the commentators maintain that it was brought along an underground passage over a distance of two months but how, they cannot say. The greatest shaykh, Shaykh al-Akbar, SHAYKH MUḤYĪ AD-DĪN IBN 'ARABĪ says that it was not the throne of Bilqīs but another one made to resemble hers, a copy of the original. For when Bilqīs arrived at Sulaymān's ﷺ court, she was asked, 'Is thy throne like this?' and not, 'Is this your throne?' And she answered, 'As if it were it, it seems the same'. Shaykh Muhyī ud-Dīn says that from this it is clear that the throne did not move in time, for any body needs time to change its location. The Lord, he says, in the perfection of His Power can bring into

existence what was non-existent in less than one instant, and He can make things disappear as He wills. As it is written,

"*What, were We wearied by the first creation? No indeed, but they are in uncertainty as to the new creation.*" [Qaf, 50:15]

Presently it was announced that Bilqīs was approaching the borders of Sulaymān's ﷺ kingdom with a huge army for her escort. She had locked her throne in her palace and guarded the key to it on her own person. When Sulaymān ﷺ was told of her approach he said, "I am expecting her, she is my guest." His counsellors said, "O Sulaymān, can she be counted as a guest, coming with such an army that could lay all our lands to waste?" "Who can tell," answered Sulaymān ﷺ, "perhaps it is an honour for us that she comes with such a large retinue," for he had received a revelation concerning this matter and nothing could sway him. Bilqīs crossed the border with her army of many tens of thousands. "How shall we feed such a tremendous host," mused the Banī Isrā'īl, "surely they have come to make war on us ..." and they were afraid.

Sulaymān ﷺ expected the queen in his palace and did not go out to meet her. Her officers and ministers said to her, "He is not paying you proper respect; why does he not come out to receive you? After all, you are the daughter of the sun and we are a mighty army not to be belittled ..." But Bilqīs stood firm by her peaceful intentions and would not listen to those who spoke against Sulaymān ﷺ. One day, a man was brought to her by her scouts, an Israelite who had fled to Egypt and who was opposed to Sulaymān ﷺ, wishing to assume power over Israel himself. He tried to convince the queen that Sulaymān ﷺ was a powerful sorcerer who would engulf the whole world if he were left unchecked. He hoped to win Bilqīs over and overthrow Sulaymān ﷺ with her help. Then he would marry the queen and become ruler over the vast kingdom himself. But the queen replied, "You have offered to show us secret ways into the country of Sulaymān ﷺ which none but a native can know, and you wish to defeat Sulaymān ﷺ by treason. If you were a true and trustworthy man, you would have stayed in your country and fought until a decision was reached, but you fled and now have

become a traitor to your king and your own people. A traitor can never be trusted." And she sent him away in disgrace. Her commanding officers reproached her for this and said, "O our queen, you have wasted a great opportunity. We could have taken the land without a drop of blood being spilt had you only listened to that man, but you have missed your chance. You smote the hand that sought to help us." She replied, "A traitor may never be trusted. If he can do so to his own people, what will he not do to a stranger?" They continued to grumble and pointed out again that she was being insulted by Sulaymān ﷺ because he did not come in person to receive them. While they were yet exchanging such words, three men came bearing a message from Sulaymān ﷺ. They told the queen, "Our lord and king Sulaymān sends you his welcome and says he would wish to come out to meet you, but as you have come with such an enormous escort, it would only be proper for him to come to you accompanied by an army of equal numbers to do you honour. He is afraid that a very slight event or misunderstanding might trigger a clash between the armies with unforeseeable consequences. Therefore, Sulaymān ﷺ has refrained from coming out to meet you, and lets you know that he is awaiting you in his palace as his highly honoured guest with as many of your retainers as you require."

When the Jinn and Ifrīt had learnt that Sulaymān ﷺ was contemplating marriage with the queen of Sheba they were disturbed, for Bilqīs was partly Jinn herself. They feared that a child born of that union would perpetuate their yoke and that they would never be freed from the bondage and forced labour that Sulaymān ﷺ had imposed on them, by the Grace of Allah. So they tried to influence Sulaymān ﷺ against this match by implying that Bilqīs was not of sound mind. "She is mad," they said, "you haven't seen her yet; besides she has hairy legs and her foot is like a donkey's." To see if this was true, Sulaymān ﷺ had a special hall prepared through which Bilqīs had to pass on entering the palace. The floor of this hall was made of glass which appeared to be water. Beneath its glittering surface there seemed to be fish and water plants, but it was all an artful il-

lusion. When Bilqīs came to the mirror glass, she took it to be water and lifted her skirts and exposed her legs for a moment.

"*It was said to her, 'Enter the pavilion.' But when she saw it, she supposed it was a spreading water and she bared her legs. He said, 'It is a pavilion smoothed of crystal.'*" [The Ant, 27:44]

So it became obvious that she had not the foot of a donkey. When Bilqīs realised that it was not water she was crossing, she let her robe fall quickly and took a lesson from this: things often are not what they appear to be. Next she was led up to her throne and Sulaymān ﷺ asked her,

"*'Is thy throne like this ?' She said, 'It seems the same'*" [The Ant, 27:43]

From her answer, Sulaymān ﷺ understood that her mind was quite sound. She had not yet accepted Islam, but the moment she set eyes on the prophet and his shining countenance, all her impure intentions melted away. She beheld the prophetic light that surrounded him. She saw that he stood for everything that was good and holy, and that she had been mistaken all along in there object of her worship; the sun she had adored till then now appeared to her no bigger than a pin-head.

"*She said, 'My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, and I surrender with Sulaymān to Allah, the Lord of all Being.'*" [The Ant, 27:45]

Sulaymān ﷺ then taught her the true religion of Allah and she accepted and surrendered to the truth. With her, her whole court and counsellors believed and deplored the days of their ignorance. They stayed as Sulaymān's ﷺ guests for some days. According to one narration, Sulaymān ﷺ himself married the queen, and together they had a son, but other traditions state that he married her to the Tubba' of Hamdan and that they returned together to her country, and they were blessed till the end their days.

74 — THE STORY OF BILQĪS

IN THE KINGDOM OF SABA' there once lived a king. One day, he went out hunting in the mountains around Ṣan'ā'. He went deep into the forests and all his servants remained behind. Bow and arrow in his hand, the king chanced upon two snakes who were struggling with each other in a clearing, one of them black, the other white. The black snake had the white one in a stranglehold and would have soon killed it, had not the king suddenly been inspired to shoot his arrow at the black snake so that it died, allowing the white snake to escape.

It was night and the king had retired into his private apartments. All the doors and windows were closed and everyone in the palace had gone to bed. There in his bed-chamber, the king unexpectedly came upon a strange person who seemed to be waiting for him. It was inconceivable to the king how that person might have entered, how had he passed by all his watchmen who guarded his rooms, and he took fright. The person however said, "Do not be afraid of me. I am a Jinn, and doors and walls mean nothing to me. I can pass through them and enter at will." "And what is it you want of me?" asked the king. "I have come to reward you for your good deed, for you saved my life today. Do you recall the black snake you killed in the woods? That was the son of my worst enemy, and you helped me a great deal. I was that white snake and I am the son of a great fairy king. Therefore, I have come to reward you. What is it you wish?" "What can you offer?" asked the king. "I am in possession of great treasures and I will give you so much that your treasure-houses will overflow." "No," answered the king, "I need no more treasures, I am already exceedingly rich, thank you. What else is there?" "I possess great medical knowledge and healing powers. If you wish I can impart them to you and you will know what no man knows." "No," said the king, "I also possess sufficient knowledge of medicine, that is not what I want." "The third thing I have to offer," said the fairy prince, "is my sister. I have a sister whose beauty is unrivalled by any

on earth, and if you wish, I will give her to you as your lawful bride." This proposal pleased the king and he consented. The fairy was ready to draw up the marriage contract on the spot, but first he informed the king of a few conditions his sister had set. "She desires no material goods. The only thing she asks of you is that you voice no complaint or objection to whatever she may do, even if it seems impossibly wrong to you. She will explain all her actions to you in her own time but the moment you forget your promise and reproach her angrily for what she has done, the marriage will be anulled and voided. She is then free from obligation towards you and you will never find her again." The king readily agreed to this condition, for he thought, "What on earth can a girl want? She will say, 'Buy me this' or 'Buy me that,'" and he made little of the deal. The contract was signed and the fairy princess appeared. The moment he laid eyes on her, he fell madly in love with her, so great was her beauty and charm. The couple was married, and they knew great happiness with each other.

After a year had gone by, the fairy queen gave birth to a baby girl. The king had secretly hoped for a son to be born to be his heir but when he went to see his baby daughter he saw that she was a lovely little girl and his heart was glad. He kissed his wife and said, "Perhaps Allah will give us a son the next time." He handed the child back to her mother. The fairy queen took the child by her little leg and hurled her into the great log fire that was burning in the open fireplace of the room. The fire flared up and made a great hissing and roaring sound and the baby disappeared. The king was too stunned to speak at first, so he could not ask his wife why she had done such a ghastly thing. When he recovered, he remembered the condition of the contract that forbade him to demand explanations from her for her actions. Since he loved her so very much and could not envisage a life without her, he kept his silence and wept for his baby daughter in secret.

Another year went by and a second child was born to them. This time it was a boy. The king went in to his wife to congratulate her, and he spoke prayers and blessings over the child.

His mother reached out for the child, asking that he be given back to her. At that very instant, a great dog with enormous fangs appeared in the doorway and the fairy queen tossed her baby up in the air for the dog to catch. The great hound caught the infant in midair between his teeth and loped away with his catch.

This time the king was even more upset at what his wife had done than the first time, but he controlled himself and voiced no objection for fear of losing his beloved fairy forever and he wept only in the privacy of his retreat.

Some time passed and they had no further children. One day, the king had reports that his powerful enemy was preparing an invasion into his territory with a great army at the ready to destroy his kingdom. The king arose and made ready for battle. He mustered his army and had water skins filled and provisions prepared for the soldiers. Just as the battle was about to begin, the king received a message from the front line: "O our king, we are defeated before the battle has begun. Before us is the enemy and behind us there is not a drop of water, nor a morsel of bread to supply the troops, for your own wife, the queen, has slit open all our water-skins with a knife and all the water has run into the ground. And she has mixed the flour and rice with sand so it has become inedible. Nothing is left for us: before us the enemy, behind us the enemy — we are finished!"

This time the poor king could no longer keep his patience with his wife's bizarre actions. He went to her and began to shout at her, "What else shall we have to endure at your hands? Now we are at the mercy of our enemy through your doing. You have robbed us of all our provisions. How shall our men fight the invaders without supplies? When our daughter was born you flung her into the fire, and our son you fed to the dog. Now you would have us all perish at the hand of our enemy. What have we done to you that you treat us so cruelly?" And he spoke many bitter words that he had held back in his heart for so long until he had vented all his anger. At last his wife said, "Are you finished?" "Yes," said the unhappy king, "I am utterly finished." "Then I will explain the matter to you," said

the queen. "Up until now you have been patient, and that was very good; but, alas, your patience has come to an end and this signifies the parting between me and thee. From now on we must be separated and you will not ever see me again. But I will explain to you the meaning of my actions, on account of which, you have doubted me. Firstly, your chief vizier has been bribed by your enemy with a great sum of money and he has poisoned all the water and supplies for your men. Had they been left to consume them, all the men and their officers would have perished and your enemy would have taken your place with no trouble at all. If you want you can confirm this. Have the chief vizier brought and make him eat some of the leftover foodstuff and drink some of the remaining water, and you will see that I speak the truth."

The vizier was called for, and as he refused to taste any of the food or water, he was forcefully made to do so, and just from the few drops remaining at the bottom of a jug, the man died in convulsions within seconds. The king saw that his queen had spoken truly. She continued, "This I have done for the good of your country. As for our daughter, I gave her to be nursed by one of my fairy attendants at my command." She whistled briefly and the sound brought to sight a gigantic Jinn holding the king's daughter upon her knee. "This is your daughter," said the queen and she is to remain with you." Then she whistled a second time and another Jinn appeared with the king's son. The queen said, "I gave him to be educated by my people. This is my son. He will stay with me." Then she whistled a third time and all her relatives from among the Jinn and fairies assembled and routed the enemy by unleashing terrible storms and cyclones against them, so that they fled in utter panic and disarray, escaping with their bare lives and leaving all their belongings behind.

The queen then spoke her parting words to her husband, "Take all this as spoils of war, they are yours. Your daughter is also yours — but me you shall never see again." With that she and her whole entourage disappeared from the king's sight. The king was left with all the riches gained in battle and

he paid his army with them. But after the loss of his life's love he could no longer govern his country, for his heart was broken. He donned a pair of iron sandals and took a staff of iron and went off into the woods and mountains, to hopelessly seek his lost wife. He was never seen again, and they counted him among those whom the Jinn have driven to madness. No trace of him was ever found. As the throne was now empty, they set his daughter upon it and she ruled the kingdom. She was Bilqīs, the queen of Sheba.

75 — SULAYMĀN'S ﷺ RULE

ALLAH ALMIGHTY HEARD Sulaymān's ﷺ prayer and granted him a kingdom such as no king has ever ruled, not before and not after his time. Sulaymān ﷺ had many mosques and study houses built, so that his people could be instructed in the law of the Torah and the holy rites. Sulaymān ﷺ supervised all matters personally and made sure that his orders were carried out correctly. The winds transported him wherever he wished to go, and he would appear at unexpected moments in surprising places. Sulaymān ﷺ concerned himself with every aspect of government, from road repairs to exacting justice, from farming to establishing hospitals. He was a model king.

All creatures, Jinn, men, Ifrīt, birds and beasts, and the winds from east to west were under his command and subdued by his will. Sulaymān ﷺ assigned men of knowledge to take the seats of wisdom and to be his ministers at court. The Jinn were often strange to behold: some had a human face and a lion's body; others had the head of an ox and the body of a snake; some had dragon's heads and griffin claws, whilst others had a monkey-face and a donkey-foot; yet others had a lion's head on an elephant's trunk. Some had four feet and fire came from their mouths. They ate their food and drank their water only when it boiled. The head of all the birds was the Simurgh, and the lion was the king of the beasts of prey. Sulaymān ﷺ made the elephant king over all the other animals because of his great

size, and the snakes were ruled by the dragons. But Sulaymān ﷺ ruled over them all and they were sub-servient to him.

Sulaymān ﷺ commanded the Jinn to weave him a carpet. The warp was to be of gold and the weft of silken thread. Its length and breadth both were to be three miles, and Allah only knows what patterns and magical symbols were woven into it. Sulaymān ﷺ set up his court upon this carpet. Upon it he placed his throne which was named the "Star of Janna" and he surrounded it with two thousand seats of honour for all the holy men and seers he kept in his company. He set up another row of twelve thousand seats made of sandalwood and cedar for the Rabbis and teachers. Also there were seventy-thousand prayer niches made of silver and gold for the saints and dervishes who were always engaged in devotions and the study of the Holy Torah and the Zabūr. The wind brought to Sulaymān ﷺ the voices of all of them, and the constant recitation of sacred knowledge. The wind carried this carpet wherever King Sulaymān ﷺ wished to go, and it covered a distance of one month in a single day, as it is written:

"*And to Solomon the wind; its morning course was a month's journey and its evening course was a month's journey.*" [Sabā', 34:12]

The throne of Sulaymān ﷺ stood on seventy pillars, and at the base of each pillar was a lion made of pure gold with eyes of red rubies and crowns of beryl upon their heads. Each lion was mounted upon a dragon, and above each of them there was a golden peacock. When a person approached the king on his throne with a good intention in his heart, pearls were showered upon him, but if he bore any ill will, the lions would growl and lift their paws ready to attack. Behind each of the pillars stood a great and terrifying Ifrīt, and to Sulaymān's ﷺ right there stood an angel with a drawn sword ready to smite any of the disobedient Jinn. The birds joined their wings above the throne and formed a canopy of shade above Sulaymān ﷺ and a gentle breeze always fanned him.

Sulaymān ﷺ had three-hundred wedded wives and seven-hundred concubines from among his slave-girls, and he consorted with them all. One day, he prayed that he might have a

son and promised that he would train his son to become a holy warrior. But, by the Might of Allah, of all those women only one of his mates became pregnant, and in due time she gave birth to only half a son: he had one eye, one nostril and one hand, as if he had been cut in half, and yet the child lived. Sulaymān ﷺ was very upset at this unfortunate birth. His wise counsellor and friend Asaf came to him and said, "Each of us has a secret which he has revealed to no-one up until this time. Let us all come together, you, my king, the child's mother and I and reveal what is hidden in our hearts. If Allah wills, he will make the child complete."

The three of them assembled and Asaf began, "It may seem as if I attached no importance to appearances, and that is the impression I seek to create, but as a matter of fact I am profoundly attached to appearances. It is most important to me to be honoured and respected. This is what I hide from the world." Then Sulaymān ﷺ himself spoke, "The Lord has given me an over-abundance of everything, every conceivable treasure I can call mine. Yet I am very fond of gifts, and I love to receive presents." Last of all the woman spoke, "For me it is not so very important to be the Padishah's wife, I would just as soon be the wife of any ordinary person. The thing that matters most to me is to stay young."

After they had each voiced their inner and secret thoughts, they prayed together to the Lord, and through His infinite Mercy, the child was made whole.

76 — SULAYMĀN'S ﷺ JUSTICE

ONE DAY, when Sulaymān ﷺ was yet a child, his father, Dā'ūd ﷺ, was holding court and hearing his subjects' complaints. A very poor woman came to the door where Sulaymān ﷺ sat, crying bitterly. Sulaymān ﷺ asked her what occasioned her grief. The woman said, "Oh, what shall I tell you. I have two orphaned children and I had two handfuls of wheat which I took to the miller to be ground. On my way home, the wind

blew strongly and lifted up my bag of flour and blew it towards the sea. Now I have nothing to feed my children. That is why I am crying." Sulaymān ﷺ said, "Go inside and make your complaint." "But there is nobody against whom I could complain," cried the woman, "it was the wind that blew my flour away, and the wind is scot-free ..." "Do as I say to you." Repeated the child Sulaymān ﷺ, "go inside and complain."

The woman went inside, hopeful of being paid some indemnity, and she came before Dā'ūd ﷺ, sitting on the throne of justice. She told him her story and said she wished to file a complaint against the wind. Dā'ūd ﷺ said, "What shall we do? The wind is neither man nor Jinn, he is no

creature we can bring to court. But I will give you four measures of flour for the two you have lost." The woman was given her four measures of flour and she left the courtroom most contentedly. On the threshold, she met Sulaymān ﷺ. He asked her, "Why did you accept the flour? Did I not tell you to file a complaint against the offender?" "But it was the wind," said the woman, "nobody can condemn the wind." But Sulaymān ﷺ insisted, "Go back and say, 'I don't

want your flour. I wish to launch a complaint against the wind. I accuse him of stealing my flour."

The poor woman went back before the judge and spoke as Sulaymān ﷺ had advised her. Dā'ūd ﷺ said, "But woman, do you not understand, this is not a case for the courts. Nobody can bring the wind to justice." And he ordered her to be given eight measures of flour. The woman took her eight measure and left, even happier than before. Again she met Sulaymān ﷺ at the gate. "So you have accepted more flour?" he asked. "Go again, leave the flour and do as I have told you." Again the woman returned and repeated her words for a third time and came out with sixteen measures of flour. Sulaymān ﷺ sent her back in and seeing the woman for the fourth time, the prophet Dā'ūd ﷺ was puzzled and asked her, "Woman, what is it with you? You accept our flour and go away, outside you change your mind and come back in, demanding your rights. Who is outside giving you this advice?" She said, "O my king, it is your

son Sulaymān ﷺ. He keeps sending me back in here." Dā'ūd ﷺ called his son to come in and said to him, smiling at the child, "My son, what do you mean by your action? We are dealing not with man or beast or Jinn, but with the wind. How shall we bring the wind to justice?"

Sulaymān ﷺ answered, "O my father, if you were but a king, this case would not concern us and I would not be sending this woman back in. You have reimbursed her splendidly for her loss and she has no reason to complain. But you are a prophet and so you must look into this affair at a deeper level: there must be a hidden cause for the wind to carry off the woman's bag of flour." Dā'ūd ﷺ saw that his son spoke truly and he prayed that Allah might enlighten him. As he was completing his supplication, the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to him and said, "Your son Sulaymān ﷺ is right. On the high seas there is a ship that struck a rock, and a hole has opened in its hull through which water is entering. The passengers had given up hope for their lives and were wailing and crying, and pledging half their worldly belongings in *ṣadaqa*, if only the Lord would save them. Allah Almighty heard their prayer and commanded an angel to quickly stop up the hole in the ship. This angel came flying at lightning speed and grabbed the bag of flour off this woman's back and stuffed it in the hole in the ship's hull. A firm dough formed around its edges so that the ship was made watertight once more. This ship has now safely reached your shores. Now, this woman is a righteous person, moreover, her need is great; the Lord therefore commands you to have the sums paid to her which were pledged by the passengers saved from shipwreck by the Mercy of the Almighty." Dā'ūd ﷺ then went out with his retainers to meet the ship as it was coming in. The woman was given all the money that had been pledged and life was made easy for her from then on.

Even during his father's lifetime, Sulaymān ﷺ was always present when his father sat in court and heard witnesses in his cases. He attended silently, listening and learning. Afterwards he would go to the palace gardens and, gathering his playmates about him, he would enact scenes from the world of the grown-

ups, such as he had witnessed in his father's court. He developed his own ideas of justice in this way.

One day, a woman was brought in to be sentenced for sodomy with a dog. She had been accused of this act by her husband's brother and four witnesses, but the truth of the matter was that she was a virtuous lady. Her husband had gone away on a pilgrimage, and her brother-in-law had come to her, making indecent offers. She had rejected him, and he left in anger and threatened revenge. So he went and bought four false witnesses and proceeded against his sister-in-law. The four witnesses bore false testimony under oath. The punishment for the crime of sodomy was death by stoning, and since there seemed to be no doubt, the sentence was passed. The boy Sulaymān ﷺ had a strange feeling about this and when he went to play that afternoon with his friends, he enacted that morning's scene at court. His father Dā'ūd ﷺ had long accustomed himself to following his son's games from a hidden distance, for he found he could learn from the justice and wisdom of his young son.

With his friends in the garden, Sulaymān ﷺ played out the scenario of the case.Each child had his role. One was the plaintiff, the other the accused, four were the witnesses, and Sulaymān ﷺ himself was the judge. When he had arranged everything so as to resemble a real court, he called in the witnesses one by one and interviewed them separately. He asked the first witness if he had actually seen the woman performing this act with the dog and the first witness replied, yes, he had. Then Sulaymān ﷺ asked him, "What was the colour of the dog?" The witness answered, "The dog was black." Then Sulaymān ﷺ had the second witness brought in and questioned him out of earshot of the other witnesses. This one said the dog had been red, and the next witness claimed it had been a yellow dog, while the fourth maintained it had been a white dog with a torn ear. Sulaymān ﷺ then sentenced all four witnesses to be whipped for calumniating a blameless person. He judged the man who had made the false accusation, and left the woman to go free.

King Dā'ūd ﷺ, watching his son and his playmates at their game, realised that he had not shown as much wisdom in the real court case that morning. It had not occurred to him to question the witnesses separately. As it was a case involving capital punishment, he decided to reopen the case, and called all the persons concerned before his tribunal once more. Then he questioned each of the witnesses separately, as he had seen his son do in his game. They got entangled in contradictions for they had not discussed such details among themselves. Each witness claimed a different colour for the dog. One said he had been lame, another said his tail was clipped, etc. So Dā'ūd ﷺ knew that they were lying and that the woman was innocent, and he revised the sentence. From that time on, it has become the custom of the courts to hear each witness by himself.

Sulaymān's ﷺ wisdom manifested already at a tender age, a fore-runner of his prophethood which was revealed to him while he was still a youth.

77 — SULAYMĀN ﷺ AND THE BIRDS

ONE DAY, all the birds stopped feeding on the worms and gathered around the prophet-king Sulaymān ﷺ to hear him address them. Among them was the Samra bird, which was the greatest bird that ever flew. Sulaymān ﷺ said to them, "Allah's decree is foreordained and nothing can change it." The Samra bird however disagreed with this, objecting, "Careful foresight can override destiny," and Sulaymān ﷺ challenged him to prove his claim. The Samra bird asked Sulaymān ﷺ to provide him with an opportunity and Sulaymān ﷺ said, "There lives a king in the East whose daughter has been promised to the son of the king of the West ,and they are destined for each other. See if you can prevent it from happening, for they are both still young children; the girl is only a baby in her cradle."

The Samra bird flew off to the kingdom of the East and kidnapped the girl-child out of her cradle and brought her to his own nest on an uninhabited island in the midst of a thick, dark

forest. There he fed and raised the child until she was about fourteen years old. The son of the king of the West had meanwhile grown into a winsome youth.

One day, he boarded a ship with his men to go on a journey. By the decree of the Almighty, the ship was wrecked at sea by a mighty storm and all perished, save the king's son. He grabbed hold of a box and clung to it and at long last, drifted ashore. As it happened, he was washed upon the shores of the island where the Samra bird had its nest. When the prince rose and found himself alive and well, he looked about, and to his great amazement beheld a beautiful young maiden in the tallest tree-top. The boy called for her to come down, but the girl signalled to him that she could not climb down. Just as the youth was about to attempt the climb, the sky suddenly darkened and the sun was hidden, as the Samra bird returned to its nest. The boy quickly hid himself inside his box, for the Samra bird was a huge and dangerous-looking bird.

When the Samra bird came home to his nest that day he found the girl in tears and asked her why. The girl had learned the language of the Samra bird and answered him, "You are gone all day and this nest is so high I cannot look over its rim. I cannot even see you coming home and it is very boring for me." The Samra bird wondered what to do about this. The girl pointed at the box down below which looked like a tree-stump from above and in a flash the bird dived down, picked up the box with its claws and brought it up into its nest. Then they ate and drank together. After a while, the Samra bird was off again on his way. — As soon as he was gone, the girl opened the lid of the box and found the prince inside it. They laughed and played and spent many happy days together. When they saw the Samra bird returning, the girl would quickly hide the prince in the box and climb on top of it, as if she used it only to look over the rim of the nest. The great Samra bird suspected nothing. Four or five months passed in this manner.

Sulaymān ﷺ called the birds to a conference and brought up the subject of divinely foreordained destiny again. He said to the Samra bird, "It was written that those two young people

by now should have married and that the girl should be four months pregnant." The Samra bird answered, "Now you see that I was right. It is possible to waive the divine decree after all, through careful planning." "Bring the girl to us," ordered the king, "and we shall see." The bird flew back to his island and told the girl that the great king Sulaymān ﷺ wished to see her. She said, "But how will you bring me there? If you take me in your claws, I will be crushed. Turn around and I will climb into this box. Then you can pick up the box and carry me off in it." The bird did as she requested. The girl climbed into the box while his back was turned and closed its lid. The Samra bird picked up the box and flew with it to the court of Sulaymān ﷺ. Triumphantly he spoke, "Now you will see. Here is the girl I have raised on my island, far from all humankind and no-one has ever seen, touched or spoken to her."

Then they opened the box and found the boy and the girl sitting within, holding hands. The Samra bird then understood that all his carefully laid plans had failed against Divine Decree. He hung his head in shame and flew away, mortified and deeply humiliated. No-one knows where he flew off to for he was never seen again. His line died out and the Samra bird became extinct. He was the greatest bird that ever lived on earth.

Among his many wives, King Sulaymān ﷺ had one wife, a Phoenician princess, who was very delicate and spoilt. One day she said to the king, "I wish you to build me a palace which is made entirely of birds' bones." Sulaymān ﷺ wished to comply with the wish of his wife, for he was in love with her, and he summoned the assembly of birds. All the birds came, except the owl. The assembly lasted for three days, and the owl remained absent throughout. On the fourth day, the owl appeared, and Sulaymān ﷺ asked him why he had not come on time. "We all waited for you, and because of your absence the discussions could not be concluded." "I was very busy," answered the owl. "And what was your very important business?" asked the king. "On the first day," said the owl, "I had to answer the very important question of whether there is more water on earth or more dry land. I was engrossed in that calculation." "And what did you find?" asked

Sulaymān ﷺ. "I counted traces of water also as water, and so I arrived at the conclusion that there is more water on earth than dry land." "And on the second day, what kept you busy?" asked Sulaymān ﷺ. "I was occupied with establishing an estimate of dry wood and fresh wood on earth. Counting every tree that has dried up branches and even dry leaves as dry wood, I came to the conclusion that there is more dry wood than green wood on earth." "And on the third day, what sort of important deliberations kept you from attending?" "On the third day I was calculating the balance between men and women living on earth." "And?" "Counting all those men who listen to the words of women as women, I concluded that there must be more women than men." Sulaymān ﷺ then understood what the owl was telling him and he repented of his silly intention.

One day, the birds came to Sulaymān ﷺ when he was holding court and they complained of the owl. "The owl," they said, "leaves us no rest at night. He himself does not sleep during the night time and he does not let us get any sleep either. But we need our good night's sleep." Sulaymān ﷺ called for the owl and asked him, "What have you to say? The birds are all complaining that you disturb their sleep at night. Why do you not sleep at night like the rest of them?" The owl responded, "O prophet of Allah, if any but you had asked this question I could understand, but that you of all people, a prophet of the Lord, should ask me this ... Do you not know that the servant may not sleep while his Lord is wakeful? This is why I do not sleep at night, but engage in the remembrance of my Lord." This answer pleased the prophet Sulaymān ﷺ and he continued speaking to the owl. "I have heard also that you never touch a grain of wheat. Is it true, and what is the reason for this?" The owl replied, "O my prophet, your father Ādam ﷺ was expelled from Paradise for eating a grain of wheat. For that mouthful of the forbidden fruit he fell from his high station and had to endure centuries of hardship here on earth, he and his descendants after him. How then should I want to taste of the grain that was the cause of all his suffering?" "I have also heard," said Sulaymān ﷺ, "that you never take a single drop of water.

Why is that?" "O Sulaymān, do you not know that the curse of Nūḥ ﷺ brought the rain of perdition down upon the earth, causing all living things to perish? That is why I do not touch a drop of water now." "And why is it you always choose to nest in ruins?" asked the king. "O prophet of the Lord, ruins are Allah's heritage. No-one desires such a place. Therefore, I live in peace in what I have inherited from my Lord." Sulaymān ﷺ then said, "O owl, will you accept me as your companion?" "O Sulaymān, you are only mortal. How should I accept as my companion one who will pass away? I choose as my companion Him Almighty, who dies not, the Eternal, Ever-Living."

One day, the hoopoe bird came and invited King Sulaymān ﷺ to a great feast in his house. "O Sulaymān," said the hoopoe, "you accept everyone's invitation; will you deign to accept mine and come to me for breakfast? Bring with you all your men and retinue. They will all be my guests." And he pointed with his wing to a certain place on the seashore where he lived. Sulaymān ﷺ and all his men arrived there the next morning to take their breakfast but they found nothing in that place but the deserted coastline. There was no sign of a feast or of any preparation and the hoopoe bird himself was absent as well. Sulaymān ﷺ and his men sat down to wait for a while and before long they saw the hoopoe bird approaching, descending from high in the clouds. When he was close enough they could see that in his beak he held a cricket. He tore off its head and threw it into the sea, calling to Sulaymān, "O my king, your breakfast is ready. Please come and eat. Whoever comes too late for the meat may still drink of the broth." That was the hoopoe bird's breakfast invitation.

78 – SULAYMĀN ﷺ AND THE GIFT OF THE ANT

ONE DAY, the king of the ants heard of Sulaymān's great might and majesty and decided to go to him to pay him homage. He chose a suitable gift to present to the king; a big cricket

leg which was a great delicacy to his people. He set out on his way, dragging with him that cricket leg, many times his own size and made for Sulaymān's kingdom which was many miles away from his own. The winds brought Sulaymān ﷺ news of the ant's intention and told him of the impossible task he had set for himself. Sulaymān ﷺ then commanded the wind to lift up the ant gently and to bring him into his presence. The wind picked up the ant king with his cricket leg and brought him before King Sulaymān ﷺ.

The ant paid his respects to Sulaymān ﷺ and greeted him with deference. Then he presented his gift to the king. Sulaymān ﷺ bent down to look at the tiny thing the ant had brought. He then asked, "And what is this, my friend?" The ant replied, "O prophet of Allah, it is a nice, fat cricket leg for you which is counted as a great delicacy among my people." Sulaymān ﷺ smiled and said, "Perhaps for the ants this may be so but for us humans, of what value could it be?" The ant then spoke, "Never regard as too small or inferior what the Lord has sent you, for if He blesses that gift, it may increase and multiply in such a way that all your men could not finish it up. This cricket leg is the very best we have to offer. It is soft and juicy, yet crisp and delicious. Every part of it has a special and different flavour. Try it out and you will see!"

To please the ant, Sulaymān ﷺ laughingly ordered his chief cook to prepare the kitchen for a feast and when all was ready he had him place the cricket leg in the greatest pot. When it was cooked, he served it and by the grace of Allah, it was enough to feed all the king's household, his courtiers and his whole army, and there was still plenty left over. And never had anybody tasted anything so delicious.

This story teaches us two things: The ant with sincerity of heart set out to present its gift to Sulaymān ﷺ and intended to cross a vast distance with such a heavy burden that would make this undertaking seem an impossible task. With Divine Aid, however, he achieved his purpose and fulfilled his intention. Secondly, if the Lord wishes, He can make what seems small and insignificant to us become immensely abundant and

more than we could possibly imagine, through the blessing He imparts to it. To us it may seem impossible at times to reach our goal and to attain goodness, even if we try ever so hard. It is in Allah's power to transport us to where we wish to be, by His Will and not through our own achievements. Allah in His unfathomable Mercy does not leave us to the merits of our own works: if it be His Will, he can magnify our poor efforts a thousand times and help us to reach unhoped-for stations. It is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*So Allah multiplies unto whom He will; Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.*" [The Cow, 2:261]

79 — SULAYMĀN'S ﷺ DEATH

EVERY DAY a new tree or plant would grow in king Sulaymān's ﷺ garden. It was his habit to ask all those plants their names and purpose. In this way he learnt of their use and their benefit for mankind and he passed this knowledge on to his people. One day, he saw a new tree sprout and he asked it, "Who are you? What uses were you created for?" The seedling answered, "I am the carob tree and I shall be used for the destruction of the Temple. Make a staff out of me and lean on me." Sulaymān ﷺ then knew that his end was nigh, and he cried and prayed to the Lord. "O Lord, at least make me not to witness this event, when my life's work will be destroyed and burnt to the ground. And let not the Jinn know of my death, lest they cease working before the Temple is completed." The Lord heard and granted his wish and released Sulaymān's soul before the destruction of the Temple.

After Sulaymān ﷺ had spent his years teaching his people and ensuring their adherence to the Law, he left this task to the Rabbis and scholars whom he had trained. He retired for long periods to pray and to worship. He left his palace and moved into a little room adjacent to the Temple site. From there he would oversee the construction works, and king Sulaymān ﷺ leaning upon his staff became a familiar sight to all who

worked there. Sometimes he would not come out of his room for weeks at a time, so absorbed in his devotions was he.

Once, he was gone for such a long time that Iblīs wondered and peered through the window, but he dared not go in, for the king wished not to be disturbed. One day a Jinn had set his mind on teasing the king and had flown round and round his head — and, as a result, in less than an instant he had completely burnt to ashes. So now even Iblīs dared not enter unbidden. Iblīs only saw the figure of Sulaymān ﷺ, upright and majestic, leaning upon his staff, and he saw that the plates of food were empty.

One day, the chiefs of the Jinn came to Iblīs, their king, and complained of Sulaymān ﷺ. "He is making us work too hard, "they said, "all day we may not rest." "Does he make you work the nights as well?" asked Iblīs. "No," they answered, "at night we are allowed to rest." "Be grateful then that you need not work all night," Iblīs replied. The wind brought these words to Sulaymān ﷺ, and Sulaymān ﷺ commanded them to work at night as well from now on. They came again to Iblīs and complained even more bitterly. "Now he makes us work day and night." Iblīs asked, "Are you made to bear loads one way or both?" "No, we only are laden one way." Again, the wind brought these words to the king, and this time he ordered them to be laden with burdens both coming and going. Again they complained to their lord Iblīs. Shayṭān told them then, "Be patient a little while longer. The time is approaching, for he cannot endure overseeing this kind of forced labour much longer."

Before Sulaymān ﷺ went into his final seclusion, he called his eldest son to him and gave him a long and earnest sermon. "O my son," he advised him, "fear the Lord and stray not from the path of righteousness. Show mercy to your subjects and lead people along the straight path." He spoke as a king speaks when he is handing over his reign to his successor. Then he dismissed him with these words, "And do not come into this mosque again without having been summoned." Sulaymān ﷺ then retired, and the prince went off believing his father had transferred power to him.

A whole year passed and no-one had seen or spoken to King Sulaymān ﷺ. He stayed in his room, leaning on his staff and the plates of food were always empty. However, he had meanwhile, died, but remained standing upright so that the Jinn would not know of his death and continue their labour to complete the temple. Days, weeks, months went by. All this while, a little woodworm had found its way into Sulayman's staff, and was gnawing away at it, eating it up from inside, little by little. After a whole year had passed, the staff finally collapsed into powder, and the body of Sulaymān ﷺ fell to the ground.

When the Jinn learned of Sulaymān's ﷺ death they said, "We knew of his death all along," but that was a lie. For had they known they would never have continued their forced labour; they would have dropped everything and run off, but they would not admit to that. This is proof, however, that the Jinn do not know the unseen. It is hidden from them as it is hidden from men, except for what the Lord reveals. Had the Jinn had knowledge of the unseen, they would have known that their taskmaster had died and would have laid down their tools. Thus the Temple was completed on the very day Sulaymān's ﷺ death was discovered, Praise be to the Lord Almighty Allah.

The Jinn liked to boast of their achievements and claimed they had built a number of castles and fortresses in the land of Saba' in Southern Arabia. Inscriptions have been found in many of these castles, reading, "We worked for seven years and we have built Salhun, Salwa, Marwa, Bayan and Kalsun castles. And we dug seven moats around these castles for the collection of rainwater." But the Lord only knows who actually inscribed these lines in rock.

King Sulaymān ﷺ in all his majesty and perfection of worldly power still found no protection from the ultimate fate of all mortals. He lived on earth no longer than sixty years. Allah Almighty has not made known to us his gravesite. According to some traditions, the fairies set the body of the king upon his throne and carried both to an island in the seventh sea. Upon this island, there is a mountain in which there is a cave, and they placed him therein. There he remains seated to this very

day. Other accounts say he was buried in the city of Dā'ūd, Jerusalem. But Allah knows best.

We must remember Sulaymān ﷺ as a mighty king, a king, who was given power not only over this world but also over some of the invisible, higher worlds. His power was not the ordinary power of an earthly sovereign. He was a prophet as well as a king, and his knowledge extended far into the unseen. He reigned over Jinn, men and beasts, and his name is praised and unforgotten, even to our very day.

May Allah have endless mercy upon his blessed soul. Amīn.

PART III

80 — THE BREAKING UP OF SULAYMĀN'S KINGDOM

AFTER THE DEATH of Sulaymān ﷺ the unity of the Banī Isrā'īl was again endangered. Rehoboam took up the reign after his father. The leaders of the other tribes came to him and told him they would accept his kingship only under certain conditions. "Your father Sulaymān," they said, "did not follow every letter of the Law, for did he not marry idol-worshipping women? Therefore, we ask you not to force any rules upon us and leave us to sort out our own affairs, so that the burden may be lighter for us." The tribes came to a meeting at Shekhem. "Let us decide for ourselves in religious matters," they said. But they spoke from a hidden desire for idolatry, and falsely claimed that King Sulaymān ﷺ had promised to make an idol for one of his foreign wives. Rehoboam objected saying, "How can I permit you to do such things, for they are abominations in the sight of the Lord?" But they argued with him, saying, "There should be no compunction in matters of religion, let us decide for ourselves." "But have we not our books and divinely revealed Law, and are we not bound to them by covenant? That religious tolerance you speak of is for the subjected kingdoms under our rule on whom we levy taxes; they may worship whatever they wish, we cannot force them to believe. It is a different matter for us." As they could not agree, Rehoboam bade them give him time for deliberation. First he went to consult with the leaders of his tribe who said to him, "It is best you do as your father has done. Except for Yehūda and Ephraim, the tribes are basically against you and seek only an opportune moment to break away. You are not a prophet, you have no prophetic power or miracles to bind them with, you are but a king and the son of a king. So you must act wisely and meet them with mildness and tolerance in order to win their support and recognition. If you act towards them with forbearance, they will quickly give up lusting after idols; use no force against them, but try to teach and admonish them with wisdom." Rehoboam said, "But what if they demand

an idol in open contradiction to the Law? Will they obey me, even if I refuse to grant them permission?" The elders replied, "A prophet will appear and guide them back to the straight path."

Rehoboam was not entirely pleased with the advice of his aged counsellors. He turned to the younger men of his court. "The people are demanding that I release them from the yoke of religious duty that my father has placed upon them. What is your opinion?" he asked them. The young men flared up angrily and replied, "Do you believe it is the burden of their religious duties that is weighing on them? Nay, it is the weight of their desires that oppresses them in truth, and you should tell them that you intend to deal with them even more harshly than your father." Rehoboam decided to follow their advice. "My little finger is thicker than my father's forearm," he told the leaders of the tribes. The tribes were displeased and dissociated themselves from King Rehoboam from that time on.

Rehoboam trusted still in the strength of his inheritance and in the Holy Ark that was kept in the temple at Jerusalem. Ephraim and Yehūda accepted him as their king, and against the advice of his elder counsellors who were very upset at the division of the tribes and counseled patience, Rehoboam hurriedly assembled an army, and bringing the Holy Ark out of the temple, prepared to march against the ten rebellious tribes. He was as yet an inexperienced and impatient man. The Muslims did not really want to go to war against their blood-brothers and close-of-kin. The other tribes were trying to decide on who should be their own king, for they were afraid that this question might cause further disunity among them. Jeroboam, son of Nebat who had fled to Egypt in the time of Sulaymān ﷺ heard of these events and returned to Israel. He promised to give the people all they asked for, and they made him their king, as it had been foretold. In this way the kingdom was divided: to the north lay the kingdom of Judah under King Rehoboam with the capital Jerusalem, to the south Jeroboam ruled the ten tribes and made idols for them, as many as they wished for. All the priests and men of learning whom Sulaymān ﷺ had trained and instructed in his time fled from the lands under his domin-

ion and came to Jerusalem. Jeroboam found others to take their places, and they were such as knew no pangs of conscience and made lawful what was forbidden, so that once more, perverseness and depravity became commonplace in the land. Older men who had been counsellors and ministers in the time of King Sulaymān ﷺ were much aggrieved to see the light vanish from their country, but when they spoke out to Jeroboam he put them to death and condemned them to silence.

Jeroboam looked for an excuse to go to war against Judah, and under a pretext he incited the king of Egypt, Shishak, to declare war against Rehoboam. He wrote him a lying letter, saying that a daughter of his who had been King Sulaymān's wife was being held in Judah against her will. But this was not true, on three accounts: the woman had become Muslim, and she wished to spend the rest of her days in the City of Dā'ūd and be buried beside her husband, and she also had believing sons and daughters and did not wish to return to the idolatrous country of Egypt. But little did Jeroboam care for truth, and soon Shishak had mustered a great and well-armed company, and in the fifth year after Sulaymān's ﷺ death he led them against Rehoboam of Judah, joined by Jeroboam and the tribes. He took all the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem. From there he took away the treasures from the temple and the treasure of King Sulaymān ﷺ. He took all the golden shields from the palace guard and many precious things besides. Then he retreated to Egypt. This was the first calamity to befall the Banī Isrā'īl after the division of the kingdom.

But people are foolish, and they wrongly understood the events and misinterpreted the fact that harm had come on the House of Judah and not on the House of Israel. "The people of Israel were saved because they are protected by the golden idols they have made," they thought, "and we were defeated because we lack such protection." These rumours reached even to Rehoboam, and for a brief moment he too hesitated, but in the end listened to the priests and wisemen counseling him, and in the end upheld the belief in the Oneness of Allah and overrode the doubts of his people.

The victory over Judah was not final, and for years the wars between the two kingdoms dragged on. After King Rehoboam reigned his son Abijah, and after him his son Asa. Fighting continued for years, though the people of Judah tried to live by the Law and abide by the teachings of their prophets. But often their hearts grew sore and they prayed that Allah might at last send them another true prophet, for the false prophets that had arisen in the land were many. They longed for such a messenger from their Lord, saying, "Has not the Lord sent a messenger from Him to every people, no matter what their condition? We will brace ourselves with patience and hope to see such a prophet yet, if it be the Will of the Lord."

What is, after all, the passage of time? Sixty years, seventy years, even one hundred years? If Allah finds even four believers among a people, He will grant them a respite, and there were many believers living in Judah at the time. But there were also many who craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the idolatrous rites that were practised beyond their borders, and they were fascinated by evil lusts. Where open warfare could not win the day, hypocrisy and stealthy propaganda took over, and plainly it was only a question of time before the edifice of righteousness would crumble to ruins.

Many times of an evening the aged grey beards living near the temple could be seen bowing their heads low and weeping in supplication for the good of their people. They would recite what was remembered from the writings of Dā'ūd ﷺ or the inspirations of Sulaymān ﷺ and their hearts would overflow:

"Save us, our Lord, for the times ebb low,
The believing few among us soon will go.
A man sells to his neighbours lies,
Forked-tongue his speech, perfidy his heart disguise.
Idols fill this world, the earth is soaked with blood,
Help us, o Lord, and send us, to stay this evil flood,
A messenger whom You Yourself inspire
To purify the hearts to do as You desire."

81 — ILYĀS عليه السلام —
AHAB MEETS ILYĀS عليه السلام

IT WAS FIFTY-SEVEN YEARS after the death of the prophet Sulaymān عليه السلام and the division of his kingdom. For twelve years Ahab, son of Omri, had ruled over Israel, and Jehoshaphat, son of Asa ruled over Judah and there was constant strife between these rival kingdoms.

One evening King Ahab lay reclining in his palace at Samaria and heaved a profound sigh. At once his courtiers rushed to attend to him and asked, "O our king, what ails you, what troubles your mind to make you sigh?" The king replied, "How should I not sigh? After all, I am but a human being, and humans sometimes sigh." "But," they went on, "you have no reason to sigh, you are not ill, and any diversion is at your command." The king hung his head and confessed, "I am bored," he said, "everything has begun to be tedious, all has been done before, nothing is new and fresh." The courtiers advised him to go out on a hunting expedition, that would surely refresh his spirit. So the king set out with a few of his retainers and they went hunting as far as the far bank of the Jordan River. There they stayed for a while and amused themselves with the pastime of hunting, until after a fortnight King Ahab wearied of that as well and said, "Now I have had enough of hunting; this, too, has begun to bore me." And his lassitude was even greater than before.

On their return journey they passed through a lovely village. It was springtime and all the fields and orchards were in bloom. Ahab bade his servants ride on ahead and leave him to contemplate the beauty of the land by himself. When they had all gone away, King Ahab suddenly grew aware of a presence watching him from one of the nearby caves, and as he stared he gradually discerned a man whose limbs seemed to be made en-

tirely of light, and a great radiance emanated from him. Ahab was awestruck, and when he finally gathered the courage to speak to this extraordinary individual, he learnt from him that he was of the sons of the village he had seen and that his name was Ilyās ﷺ. Ahab told him who he was, and asked Ilyās ﷺ to which tribe he belonged. Ilyās ﷺ answered, "What does it matter? Are we not all human beings and therefore brothers? But as you are my king and commander, I will tell you that my father is Yasīn and I trace my lineage to Harūn. I was born in the forty-fifth year after King Sulaymān's ﷺ passing, and am now twenty-five years of age." "You say we are all brothers," said King Ahab, "now, what did you mean by that?" Ilyās ﷺ was silent for a while, then he pointed to a little wild flower in the field. "O Ahab," he said at length, "consider this flower, is it not a true beauty? We as men are very proud of all our deeds, yet we cannot produce a thing of like beauty. All we admire in nature that is great and beautiful — it is not the work of man. There is one at work who is greater than we, and it is He who has created us and prepared this earth for us to inhabit and to share with all other living creatures. Can the Creator of beauty be other than beautiful, and must we not love beauty and, therefore, our Creator? If we become aware of His Existence in every moment and detail of our lives, our hearts will be filled with joy, and never will we feel the grey weight of boredom. Without this realization our hearts remain empty; no matter how we try to divert or amuse ourselves, after a while all grows tasteless. Without faith our hearts are cut off from the source of their nourishment." Ahab listened and was strangely moved, even though his mind told him that he should get angry at this man for speaking thus to him, the king. But he kept his peace and did not call for his men, and listened to Ilyās' speech, as he continued, "O Ahab, the choice is yours, it lies in your hands. The Holy Torah which Allah Almighty revealed to Mūsā ﷺ is nearly forgotten, and the Zabūr of Dā'ūd ﷺ as well. In your kingdom idolatry has spread far and wide, along with all the abominations accompanying this misguided practice. Your people live no better than the grazing beasts, — nay, so much the worse, as they fall

far short of their divinely appointed destination. Do you not remember that our Lord Almighty vowed to give this land to the righteous among His servants? Who in our days can be said to be righteous? No, the day approaches when we will be driven from the Promised Land, as we have sadly failed in our trust." Ahab said, "Your words sound most convincing, I have heard of such things of old: perhaps you are one of the sorcerers I have heard about, who sway the hearts of men with their speech?" "No," replied Ilyās ﷺ, "I am no sorcerer, I am a prophet and only recently initiated into my prophethood. I was ordered to seek you in your capital of Samaria, but instead you have come to me, and Allah has forged a bond of friendship between us."

They spent a long time together there on the hilltop and Ahab's heart was touched by the truth. He made up his mind to mend his ways and to try to lead his people back onto the straight path, and to end the useless war that was raging between the tribes. Together they returned to the capital Samaria, but Ilyās ﷺ came not into the king's palace, but lived in a small but of his own and would meet the king in secret, for they were afraid of the jealousy and opposition of the courtiers. Ilyās ﷺ taught Ahab as his Lord instructed him, and together they worshipped, and love of the Lord united their hearts.

It was not long before the effects of Ahab's secret association with the prophet were felt. Ahab wished to make peace with the King of Judah, Jehoshaphat, and they met one day and agreed to a truce. Ilyās ﷺ informed the kings that it was Allah's wish for the two kingdoms to be reunited and soon after they set out on a joint campaign against Syria, united against their common enemy. But there were some among Ahab's men who feared for their own positions of power and were displeased by these developments and sought to undermine this truce. In particular they were jealous of the prophet Ilyās ﷺ whom they blamed for his influence on the king. They began to spread slander and evil gossip about him, but this failed to have the desired effect, for the people loved Ilyās ﷺ and they were content with the newly established peace. Besides, King Ahab let them worship as they pleased and oppressed no one. Ilyās ﷺ travelled throughout

the land, preaching and teaching the almost forgotten *sharī'a* of Mūsā ﷺ, and for a little while all seemed to be improved.

82 — AHAB IS TEMPTED

BUT AS VULTURES ARE ATTRACTED by a foul smell, soon a group of ill-intentioned, power-hungry men formed a secret circle of conspiracy, and they searched for ways to intrigue against Ilyās ﷺ and to poison the king's heart against him. One night one of these men returned home to his mother in a foul humour, for they had so far plotted most unsuccessfully. The woman asked her son about his troubles, and he told her how they considered Ilyās ﷺ an upstart who had stolen the king's affection so that none of his old advisors had any more say at court. The old woman was a crafty witch, and she had seen many things in her time. She mumbled half to herself, half to her son, "If you would bring me one hair, one hair only, then I would separate their hearts, I would split even rock with only a hair ..." Her son thought her daft and plucked a hair from his head and handed it to her. She turned on him and swore, "You have no understanding of these things, son, I cannot use one of your hairs, nor indeed one of my own. I need a hair from the head of a surpassing young beauty — then I could mould the king's heart into the shape we desire ..." Her son answered, "But mother, the king's palace is full of beautiful women, he has as many wives as he pleases — what more could he desire?" "You are foolish, you do not know the ways of the heart," answered the old witch, "there is not one he is truly in love with. When a man is madly in love with a woman, he will do anything for her, and even if he were to lose his life. He will not let go of her, once she has firmly nested in his heart. We shall see, but go now, get washed and dressed so that we can eat. Afterwards I shall tell you more of my thoughts ..."

After their meal they sat together and at length the old woman spoke. "When your father was still living, we went to Sidon once to where he had been commissioned to complete some

work for the king. As you know, your father was one of the artisans who still knew King Sulaymān ﷺ. Well, we stayed at the house of the king of Sidon for six months, and there I met this king's daughter, Jezebel. She was but a child then, but now she must have grown up, and if my memory serves me well, she showed all the signs of growing into a great beauty, such as no man can resist. Go and find out about her, and bring me one of her hairs ..."

The man went out and enquired about the princess of Sidon, and learnt that she was indeed renowned for her beauty and as yet unmarried. Her father had set out a great reward for anyone who would conclude a suitable match, for the girl was proud and she posed conditions for her suitors. After finding out all she needed to know, the old woman took her stick and went to Ahab's palace and entered the gardens by a side door. It was a moonlit night, and the king was sitting by himself, contemplating the powdered landscape. The woman began to mumble, as if she were speaking to herself, while she made sure that the king would hear her. "What is the difference, I wonder, between you, O bright moon, and our illustrious king? There you stand, lonesome in the sky shedding your pale light on all that walks below; a guide to nightly travellers and a lamp to hearts united in love — yet you remain solitary, always alone, and I would weep for your loneliness. How you do resemble our king, who is good to all his subjects and spreads a blanket of security and safety over our land; sleepers rest in peace because of his lonely wakefulness, and all are happily mated — but for him who wakes and walks alone ..." The king heard her words and they gained access to his heart, and he suddenly felt profoundly sorry for himself. For indeed, was he not the loneliest man in his kingdom, in spite of all his possessions? He turned to the old woman and said, "Mother, what then do you recommend me to do to remedy my state?" She answered, "It is not good for a man to be alone, and the remedy for a man's loneliness is a woman. You will say perhaps that your house is filled with women, but I say to you that your heart is still empty and you have not yet met your match ..." The king asked her to

speak plainly. "Have you not heard of the princess of Sidon?" she continued. "No," admitted the king. "But I have seen her," said the old crone, "and I have thought her worthy of none but you, O my king. My son is in your service in the palace guard, as his father was before him, but he has not dared to speak of this matter to you, so I have broached the subject in his stead."

Then she went on to describe the beauty of this princess, and by the time she had finished and gone off again into the night, the king's mind was already totally captivated by thoughts of this girl. The next morning he called for the son of the old woman and spoke to him in private. "Your mother seems to have great knowledge and wisdom," he said to him, "I have heard from her about the princess of Sidon, and thoughts of her have filled my heart. I charge you now to go to Sidon with your mother and win the heart and hand of this princess for me, and if you succeed, great will be your reward." "We hear and obey," said the man and left forthwith.

During this absence the king became withdrawn, and avoided seeing the prophet Ilyās عليه السلام, making excuses. Ilyās عليه السلام continued to give him advice and said to him many times, "Live with the love of your Lord and worship Him continuously — that is always the best medicine for any illness or distress, mental or physical." Ahab assured him he was doing just that but remained enveloped in his own secret thoughts and confided in none. He saw less of the prophet now and rarely called for his company.

83 — AHAB MEETS JEZEBEL

MEANWHILE his envoy returned from his trip to Sidon and reported about what he had seen there. "I have been invited to the palace, and there I have seen the girl Jezebel, and truly, her beauty is beyond description, she is perfect in every way. My mother has remained with her in order to influence her in your favour, for though she has many suitors, she has not taken to any one as yet. Her people worship idols that have the

form of cows and bulls, but Jezebel would have them worship statues made in her own image." The king was troubled in his heart when he heard this, but went to Sidon to see the princess in spite of his misgivings. He made out that he was repaying the visits of the king of Sidon, Jezebel's father, and looking into ways to further sea-trade, taking advantage of Sidon's access to the sea. When he came there and saw the beauty of Jezebel with his own eyes, he was bereft of his senses and fell madly in love. The old crone had not been idle and had worked her magic, having obtained one of Jezebel's hairs, so that King Ahab was inextricably bound.

One balmy evening he took the princess out walking and declared his love to her. She answered boldly and in haughty tones, "O Ahab, I would marry him who promises to immortalize me by making me the object of worship — even if he were a worm!" Ahab was worried by her words and did not answer her right away. Later the old witch came to him and enquired how things were going in his courtship. "Not bad, not bad," he said, "but she imposes some very heavy conditions that I do not know how to fulfill. She wishes to have idols made in her own image and for people to bow down before them. That seems to me an impossible request." The old witch gathered about her all her wile and spoke cunningly to the king, "O Ahab, I have heard people tell of the ancients that they had idols of animal shape, but with human faces. You could have the same thing done — Jezebel would then be pleased and the people who worship cows and bulls would still have idols of that shape ..." The king thought this was fair advice and asked the woman to describe to him in further detail what this idol should look like. "Let it be a great cow," she said, "neither a calf nor a yearling, for as the earth is the mother of all things, so is the cow a symbol for motherhood and nurturing. As for the cow's head, you will have it fashioned in the likeness of Jezebel, and it shall bear a fourfold face looking out in every direction. This way both the people and your bride will be pleased. No one can say it is a cow, nor can they say it is a woman, and no kingdom will have the likes of it."

The king dismissed the woman and went again at midnight to find Jezebel. As if by appointment he met her in the garden and told her about the cow-idol with her face, and he made it seem to be his own original thought. The princess was impressed and said, "Go now and have this thing fashioned, and when it is completed send for me, and I will become your wife. Only you must move your capital away from Samaria to the place called Halbun; there is a high hill which commands a good view. A great statue on the hill-top with each face looking out in a different direction will signify that you are king and lord over all the lands, east, west, north and south. This is a great and meaningful expression of your grandeur. Go now, and begin the work at once!" Ahab promised to do as she said, and thus the city of Halbun which King Sulaymān ﷺ had founded became known as Baalbek.

Ahab returned to Samaria a man besotted with love. Back in his own palace, all of a sudden the prophet Ilyās ﷺ came to his mind. He was sure somehow that Ilyās ﷺ would not like what he had done, far less what he was going to do, so he decided he must find means to remove him from his vicinity. He called for Ilyās ﷺ to come, and when he stood before him, he said, "O Ilyās, I have just returned from a trip to Sidon by the seaside, and I have travelled through the rich and fertile country that surrounds it. The people of that land enjoy much more of life's goodness than we do, compared to them we are poor and our land is barren, and I have become convinced that all their fortunes are bestowed upon them by the idols that they worship. Let us be reasonable and join them, so that we might enjoy like blessings."

Ilyās ﷺ was no longer the soft-spoken, mild-mannered prophet he had been at the time of their first meeting, he too had changed with the gravity of his mission. Hearing these words, his face flushed and his hair stood on end, and he rose to his feet. Very nearly he was swept away by the rush of righteous anger that came over him, but at the last moment he reined himself in and said only this, "We are the servants of the Lord Allah Almighty, and to Him is our return." With that

he turned and departed from the palace. He had seen that the king's mind was inflexibly bent upon his desire and all admonitions would have fallen on deaf ears, nay, endangered his very life and mission. For his part, Ahab heaved a sigh of relief, for now he was free to do what he wanted, with no interference from the prophet who spoke with the voice of his conscience. The envious courtiers, Ilyās' ﷺ enemies, rejoiced at seeing him fallen from the king's favour, and the nightly revelries and debaucheries were resumed.

84 — THE BUILDING OF BA'L'S TEMPLE

ONE DAY the king assembled his whole court, and he spoke before them and said, "O my viziers, ministers and courtiers, my priests and advisors! Do you know for what reason we have succeeded in making peace with all our neighbours? It was with the help and inspiration of the gods! But even though we are such a great and powerful kingdom we still have no specially significant idol of our own that would be a mark of distinction for us. All our neighbours have marvelous temples with many wonderful statues, Egypt, Persia, Assyria and Greece — but we still have none. Now that we are enjoying a general peace, let us too construct a great temple, such as the world has never seen before ..." And he went on to describe his project to the incredulous court. He told them the temple would lie to the north, where the major caravan routes passed, that it would measure thirty feet in length and stand on a plinth fifteen times its length in height, and that it would be made of solid gold. He told them the statue was to have a four-faced head, and would look out at the world with a woman's face, more beautiful than the queen of Sabā', Bilqīs. "For the earth, the cow, and woman," he said, "all stand for the same thing: they give birth and therefore are worshipped as life-givers." The court applauded when Ahab had finished speaking, and at once the great work was begun. They set out with camel-loads of gold and thousands of expert artisans and craftsmen. For three years Ahab did not leave the

site at Baalbek, until the temple was completed. At last the idol he had pictured in his mind was erected, and around it a huge temple was built, complete with accommodations for four-hundred priests who served the temple.

For the opening ceremony the kings of all surrounding territories were invited, including, of course, the king of Sidon and his beautiful daughter. When Jezebel beheld the great idol with all four faces resembling her own, she saw her dreams come true and cried aloud for joy. The resemblance did not escape the notice of the people, and the old woman walked among the crowds explaining how it was all done through inspiration by the gods. "You are familiar with the shape of the cow," she said, "now why does she have four faces? She illuminates all four corners of the earth with the gracious features of the mother-goddess: from now on each mother will give birth to ten sons for every daughter she bears, and this is a source of strength to us. But there is yet another meaning to this lady-cow: she is looking out for an earthly maiden resembling her, so that she may be perpetuated and the line of kings not die out. We must seek such a maiden and marry her to our king, for that is the will of the gods ..."

Soon Jezebel was noticed as she stood gazing fixedly at her own image. Ahab feigned ignorance when he was told it was the wish of the people that he marry this girl who resembled the idol so closely, and the king of Sidon brought his daughter to him, and they were married among great pomp and celebrations. The first night they were alone together the girl Jezebel voiced her thoughts. "What do you think of the old woman and her son who were instrumental in bringing us together?" she asked her husband. "I will grant them any reward they might desire," answered Ahab. "No," said Jezebel, "you are mistaken, they must not be allowed to live, for they know of our secret, and in time they might become disloyal and betray us. It is best you have them put to death." The king was surprised to hear such things from a girl only fifteen years of age, but his reasoning powers were dulled by the beauty of his bride, and he did not pause to think what notions she might develop when

she was come of age. He only admired her foresight and intelligence, as he thought it, and said to her, "You will be a great help to me in governing my kingdom. Your will shall be done this very night." Jezebel then continued, "I would not trust most of your retainers either, they are only envious of your success and most likely will rebel against you and try to usurp the throne. Best you have them all executed at once and replace them. The people are with you, you can count on their support. You need only tell them that the gods are demanding a sacrifice. Then you will be rid of all your secret enemies once and for all."

The king did as she said and had the palace guard and his mother as well as all his courtiers and ministers rounded up, drugged into senselessness and led in procession to the great temple. There he addressed them, "You have asked to be the first sacrifice to our new idol, and though I love you all greatly, I do not have the heart to deny you this great bliss, so I herewith dedicate your lives to the great fire-god." The courtiers and viziers and sorcerers were quite oblivious to what was going on, so one after the other they jumped into the pit of fire that had been lit in the temple, and so fell into the trap they had laid for themselves.

85 — QUEEN JEZEBEL RULES

ILYĀS ﷺ KNEW of all these events and he grieved. He had seen the new idol Ba'l, and he knew that behind all this was Jezebel, king Ahab's new wife, and that hers was the guiding hand and mind to all this devilry. He hoped still that people would come to their senses, when they realized after a while that this new thing was but the work of man and had neither power for good nor evil. He grieved for the hundreds that had been brought to sacrifice, for they were not all evil men, but among them were believers and Ilyās' ﷺ associates. Ilyās ﷺ went to the priests of the temple and addressed them, reminding them that they were Banī Isrā'īl and that the acts and teachings of their forefathers bound them to the one living God, Allah, and that their service

of the idol was a pagan abomination. The priests listened and hung their heads in shame, but though they were inclined towards good in their hearts they saw that it was political to keep silent and bide their time. A house servant overheard their talk with Ilyās ﷺ and reported to his mistress, Jezebel. "O Queen," he said, "all the servants of your temple are false, they are secretly followers of Ilyās ﷺ. As long as he is abroad, they will work to bring you and the great cow-goddess down!" Jezebel had already come to know this for every time she went to the great temple, she found fault with the priests and upbraided them frequently. "What is all this dust and filth on top of our goddess," she would say, "why do you not you keep her clean and honour her as you should? I am not satisfied with your service." The priests always had explanations; they said there was a constant wind blowing between those two hills and no matter how often they dusted the statue, more dust settled on it. But the queen was never satisfied. "See to it that something is done! For what do you have a whole army of servants, clean it up!"

Jezebel tried to think of ways to replace the priests with others from her hometown of Sidon where idols had been worshipped for many years. There had been many generations of idol-priests and magicians, and she knew she could trust them more than these Israelites who secretly inclined towards Ilyās' ﷺ teachings. She held her peace for a while, for she was pregnant. People had heard of the great Ba'l of Baalbek and folk from all around come to visit this marvel. All sorts of stories were spread and people believed them. It was rumoured that the golden idol would soon begin to speak, and that it was the golden calf that the Sāmirī had fashioned for the Banī Isrā'īl in the desert long ago. Now it had grown up and become a golden cow, and would soon open its four mouths to call all men on earth to its worship. People believed that this time would coincide with the birth of Jezebel's first-born child. Jezebel took advantage of the people's belief. Secretly she sent word to her father in Sidon, and had him send her several hundreds of their own priests whom she hid in nearby caves until the right time had come.

One morning Jezebel awoke and feigned sadness, and pretended to have seen a dream that troubled her. "O Ahab," she said, "I saw 450 men all clad in black circumambulating our god, each holding an oil lamp in his hand. Most of the lamps were unlit and shed no light upon our idol. Then suddenly you stepped into the ring, brandishing your sword, and slew all the men whose lamps were not shining. After that you cried aloud, and from the mountains a great many men came running who carried burning oil lamps, so that our idol sparkled and danced in all the light ..." "But why then are you crying, my dear?" asked the king, puzzled. "It sounds like a very good dream to me." "I saw that all the priests you slew were of the tribes of Israel, and the new ones were all from Sidon ..." said Jezebel. "Be that as it may, the main thing is not to anger our idol," replied Ahab. "I will go to the temple at once." Jezebel insisted that she accompany him even though she was heavy with child. That night a strong wind had been blowing between the two hills, and the idol was covered in fine dust. Moreover, the priests had not yet risen and people were waiting outside the gates to make their sacrificial offerings. The queen pointed to the idol and said to Ahab, "Look, what has become of our goddess! She has become unrecognizable with grime and filth! You can tell no feature of her face for the filth encrusted on it! Is this how you are going to immortalize me? If nothing is done, the goddess will shower her wrath upon us and will not open her mouth to speak at the time our child is born, that much is clear to me." The king listened to her until he could stand it no longer. She so provoked him that he suddenly got up and ordered for all the priests of the temple to be put to the sword. The soldiers hesitated, for the priests were of their own kinsmen, and the king drew his own sword and yelled at them, "Do you not hear me, I have given you an order!" The soldiers then obeyed their commander and within less than half an hour they had massacred all four-hundred priests and the courtyard of the temple was awash with blood. The king had their bodies cast into the fire, then he returned to Jezebel who was watching the slaughter from her carriage and said, "O Jezebel, the first

part of your dream is now fulfilled, what now?" She said, "Turn to the mountains and call out: If there be any true priests of Ba'l in these hills, let them come down to me!" Ahab hesitated, for he doubted that anyone would heed his call, and that he would lose face in front of his subjects, but Jezebel prevailed upon him. At last he raised both hands to his mouth and called out in a loud voice for the priests to come out of hiding. Everyone held their breath at what would happen next, and great was their astonishment when suddenly the mountainside came alive and a great many men in robes came running down towards the temple, heeding the king's call. They were the priests from Sidon who had been hidden in the caves by Jezebel. Now they presented themselves to Ahab, and a few hours later they were ready to begin their service at the temple. They cleaned and scrubbed the monstrous idol, until every part of it shone like new. Word of these happenings spread swiftly through the town, and few remained unconvinced of the superior power of the great idol.

86 – ILYĀS' ﷺ DEPARTURE

ILYĀS ﷺ STILL WENT ABOUT TRYING to reform his people, and he preached to them often and earnestly, warning them of the consequences of their evil actions. But who would listen to him now that the idol had gained power over their minds? The new priests raved against him and Ilyās ﷺ sought refuge in the mountainous wilds. As he was leaving, he called back to his persecutors, "O you miserable and misguided folk from whom the light of Allah is being stripped away! You are driving out the prophet who has been sent to you; from now on I shall dwell in these mountains. No one is permitted to approach me unless he believes; otherwise the fire will consume him." People laughed and scoffed at his words, thinking them the empty threats of an impotent fugitive, but Ilyās ﷺ continued, "As for the falsehood which you worship, never will that mountain of gold speak to you. The child which your queen will bear will sicken and die,

and you will be the cause of his death, as you imagine that the child will give new life and power to that dead thing which you worship."

After that Ilyās ﷺ spoke no more and went to live in a cave. He hoped that some Muslims would find their way to him, but only robbers and highwaymen came, hoping to find something to steal from him. Ilyās ﷺ prediction came true on them: as soon as they entered the cave, a flame came down to consume them, and they were destroyed. The Lord had given His protection to His prophet and none could come near him.

The Holy Qur'an says about Ilyās ﷺ:

"Ilyās too was one of the Envoys; when he said to his people, 'Will you not be godfearing? Do you call on Ba'l, and abandon the best of creators? Allah, your Lord, and the Lord of your fathers, the ancients?'

But they cried him lies; so they will be among the arraigned, except for Allah's sincere servants and We left for him among the later folk, 'Peace be upon Ilyās.'" [The Rangers, 37:123–130]

87 – JEZEBEL'S HOPES ARE CRUSHED

QUEEN JEZEBEL was furious when Ilyās's ﷺ words concerning her child were reported to her. She would make sure that the idol would speak, by the help of the priests, if needed. So she instructed them to dig channels and to lay pipes from the temple to the hollow inside of the idol, so as to produce the illusion that the idol was speaking. As her time approached more and more people gathered around the idol, waiting to hear its voice as soon as the royal child was born. Day and night the crowds at the temple waited and watched. The day came, and in the heat of the day, the queen's son was born. Trumpets were sounded at the palace and heard as far as the temple. The crowd stared fixedly at the idol's mouth, waiting for speech to issue from it. But not a sound was heard, for the priests had miscalculated and the pipes they had laid were too narrow to carry the sound over the required distance. When the queen on her childbed heard that her plans had failed, she blamed

Ilyās ﷺ for it without a moment's hesitation, saying he was a magician and sorcerer, and that the idol would refuse to speak as long as he was allowed to live. She ordered for Ilyās ﷺ to be hunted like a dog and put down, in order to appease the wrath of the idol. King Ahab was by now but a puppet in her hands and he passed on the order to his commanders. Soldiers and many men seeking reward went out and combed the hills and caves for Ilyās ﷺ, but they returned empty-handed, although Ilyās ﷺ had not moved from his cave of refuge. Allah Almighty had hidden him, and he was invisible to the hunters' eyes.

Three months on Ilyās' ﷺ second prophecy came true: the baby boy fell ill. People remembered the words of Ilyās ﷺ the prophet, and began to wonder whether perhaps he was a truth-teller after all, but Jezebel loudly proclaimed that Ilyās ﷺ was an evil sorcerer who had cast a spell upon her infant. Her priests and medicine-men would soon find a way to undo the curse and to heal her son. They applied all their knowledge and arts, but the infant's condition only worsened. Jezebel at last grew fairly desperate and ran to her husband, pleading, "O Ahab, do something, save our little son!" "But what shall I do?" said the distraught king, "have we not done all that is in our hands?" "There is yet one thing we have not done," answered Jezebel, "if we bring sacrifices to Ba'l, the gods' anger may yet be appeased, and our little son may be saved, if it be the will of Ba'l. But the sacrifice must be only of young blood. All the newly born children of this town must die for our son." For Jezebel's nature was vicious and vindictive, and she cared not if all the mothers of the town grieved for their children, if only her own child would live; and if he could not be saved, then it pleased her that no other mother should rejoice in her child. King Ahab followed his wife even into this bloodthirsty and barbarous venture, and on his command thousands of young children were slaughtered at the foot of the idol. But Jezebel did not have her will, and her son died a short while later. Again she came running to her husband, crying, "Save him, save our son, for if you fail to do so, I will surely return to my father's house!" Ahab trembled at this threat, and answered, "If there

is anyone who can recall our child from the dead, it is Ilyās, no other." "Ilyās? But is he not an evil sorcerer?" "Even so, he predicted in advance that this would happen, and it has come true." "So, if that is the case," said Jezebel, "have him brought here right away, and throw him into the dungeons; have him tortured, until he lifts this spell from us. After we are done with him, he may die."

The king did not answer but remained locked in his troubled thoughts. Jezebel grew impatient, and cried, "Go now, what are you waiting for, or is it that you are afraid of him?" "No," answered Ahab, "I am not afraid, but it is known that Ilyās has cast a spell over his environment and that whoever approaches his place goes up in flames ..." "Oh, those are but rumours," said the queen, "nobody has really tried." Ahab chose fifty of his best men, and sent them out into the mountains to find Ilyās ﷺ. Ilyās ﷺ saw them before they saw him, and he called out to them to warn them, "I am here and I am Ilyās. I am under the protection of my Lord, Allah Almighty. You may approach me only if you are believers in the one and only God, Allah, and declare yourself His servants. If you believe otherwise, surely the flames will devour you as you approach me!" The captain of the troop answered, "We know no other god than Ba'l," and gave the order for his men to apprehend Ilyās ﷺ. All his men followed their leader, and immediately the flames soared down from heaven and destroyed them.

A shepherd grazing his flocks nearby witnessed this and ran to the palace to report to the king. Other men were sent out to verify the shepherd's account and it was seen to be true. The king said to Jezebel, "I have done what you asked, and have lost fifty of my best men. Now what shall we do?" Jezebel had thought up a ruse. "Send out another search party, but instruct them to say that they believe in the god of Ilyās when he asks them, then they will come close enough to seize him." This was done, and when this party of soldiers arrived at the spot, their captain called out to Ilyās ﷺ, "O Ilyās, come out, for the king wishes to see you." "What for?" asked the prophet. "He is repentant and wishes to return to the ways of his fathers. He

will destroy the idol of Ba'l; he asks only that his little son might be revived. We too are believers in your god, O Ilyās!" Ilyās ﷺ was silent and raised his hands to heaven and prayed. "O Lord, if it is truth that these men speak, give me a sign!" The Lord answered His prophet, and fifty more of Ahab's soldiers were found burnt in that place.

When news of these events reached the palace, Jezebel was shattered and had no further counsel. She implored everyone who came before her to find a way to save her son. Finally one of Ahab's oldest viziers came to the king and said, "Let me go to Ilyās's hiding place, I will bring him to you." "No," said Ahab, "you are my right-hand man and wisest counsellor, if you go and burn, what will become of us?" "Leave it to me," said the old vizier, "I will find the means of bringing him with me." So the king gave him leave and the vizier went until he reached the foot of the mountain where Ilyās ﷺ stayed. From there he called out to the prophet, assuring him that he had come alone on a mission of parley, and begging him to come forth. Ilyās ﷺ answered and said, "Wait at the foot of the rock, I will come to you on the order of Allah Almighty and perform my task as the prophet sent to Israel, otherwise your life will be forfeit." When Ilyās ﷺ had appeared, the vizier said to him, "I will not lie to you, Ilyās. I have not come here to trick you or pretend to you that we will follow your way, I have come on account of Jezebel's son who is on the verge of death and no one can heal him. Therefore, the king and queen are calling you to help them." "What gave them that idea?" asked Ilyās ﷺ in surprise. "They believe his disease is due to some magic which you have worked," replied the wazir. "What have I to do with sorcery?" cried Ilyās ﷺ, "It is a most abominable thing in my eyes and forbidden in my religion; I know nothing of the black arts!" "But such is their belief. After all, did you not predict his illness before he was born? You did not wish their son to live they say, and now it has come to pass." "But Ahab has so many other sons who may succeed him in ruling his kingdom. This illness of Jezebel's child has been sent as a punishment for her from the Almighty, for her atrocities and crimes." "But what

is the sin of this innocent baby? What has he done to deserve death?" "Would that child not grow up to be like the rest of you, heinous idolaters? If he dies before he commits offence, he will be blameless and go straight to paradise. Think of all the temple priests whom you had killed: were not their families bereaved and their children orphaned? Do you ever think about their grief?" The vizier could find no immediate answer, so he looked about him, and suddenly he grew aware of a great many men who were watching them from caves in the mountainside. "Who are all these people?" he asked Ilyās ﷺ. Ilyās ﷺ hid nothing and answered truthfully, "They are believers who have come to me and I have taken them under my protection and housed them in these caves. There are fifty men to a cave, nine caves in all, as many as were the priests whom you had slaughtered. On the day when the idol shall fall, they will come down and erect a mosque in the spot where it stood, and the place shall be cleansed of evil." The vizier made no answer, intent on fulfilling his mission, and he repeated his invitation for Ilyās ﷺ to come with him to the king's palace. Ilyās ﷺ had a sign from his Lord and he agreed to go, but he said to the vizier, "I will come with you, but this I tell you: I am not going to heal the baby boy, my reasons for going with you are other than you can know."

They set out to return to the palace and on their way they passed by the great idol temple at Baalbek. Ilyās ﷺ paused to look at it, and after a while he said to the vizier, "What is the difference between this thing and a slab of rock? Truly, an ant has more power than this lifeless mountain of gold." The vizier hid his anger and said nothing, not wishing to displease Ilyās ﷺ at this moment which he hoped would prove the high point of his career. Ilyās ﷺ continued to watch the priests who were engaged in a complicated ritual, circumambulating the idol while rending their robes. The vizier explained to him this was done in order to appease the wrathful god in the idol so that he would restore the child to health. A great crowd of people were assembled to watch this spectacle, their eyes strangely glazed as they stared fixedly at the golden idol. They believed, Ilyās ﷺ was

told, that if the boy got well, the cow-idol would finally begin to speak. "Now only do I understand the extent of your mis-guidedness," said Ilyās ﷺ, "even if the boy got well, this thing still would never speak a single word, not in a thousand years. This land was promised and given to the righteous servants of Allah Almighty, and if you persist in your abominations, you will be driven out of this Holy Land; your idols will be smashed, and all the gold of this idol will be seized and taken from you ..." Again the vizier said nothing, so as not to alienate Ilyās ﷺ; for his one and only ambition was to do what none had done before him: to bring Ilyās ﷺ before the king.

Suddenly, as they stood watching from above, the mood of the priests also possessed the crowds of spectators and they began to twist and turn convulsively, and here and there men broke out into strange cries and chanting:

"Never has a cow been heard to speak,
but this cow of gold eats no grass, drinks no water:
it feeds on the flesh of human sacrifice and drinks red blood
no mother's newborn is safe from its craving."

Suddenly one man's loud voice interrupted these chants, and cried out, "It is clear now: our god demands the queen's child as his sacrifice, only then will he unlock his voice and speak from the cow's mouth." People cheered and stormed the temple and pressed the priests to go to the palace and tell the king of the will of the gods, as it had been revealed to them. Ilyās ﷺ speeded his pace and arrived at the palace before the high-priest. He came before Ahab and Jezebel who were expecting him impatiently. Ahab was happy to see him and reminded him of the good days they had spent together in the past. He said to Ilyās ﷺ, "We have many common memories, my friend, up to the day you were angered against me for telling you the truth and left me. Then you avenged yourself on me by casting this spell upon my son; I offer you as much gold as is contained in the statue of Ba'l if you will only undo your spell. Or, if you prefer, I will make you governor over whatever province of my kingdom that you desire ..." Ilyās ﷺ looked at his old friend sadly and said, "I have come here with a different intention. I hoped you had

finally realised the falsehood of your idolatrous beliefs and were ready to surrender to the one true God, Allah Almighty, who alone is the Giver and Taker of Life. There is nothing I can do for your little son as long as you do not believe in Him Almighty with sincerity of heart, for He will not answer my supplication." Jezebel, and with her Ahab, then tried to trick Ilyās ﷺ, and in words testified their faith, but Ilyās ﷺ was no fool and was not deceived. "You are both liars," he told them, "for in your hearts you still disbelieve, you yet deny the existence of Allah, and my prophethood as well."

At that moment a slave-girl came running and reported to the king, "Alas, the prince is dead." The king, and queen rushed from the room, and Ilyās ﷺ was left by himself. Cries of grief and wailing issued from the adjoining room. Just then the chief priest entered and asked for King Ahab. Ilyās ﷺ said, "It is over, you can tell by the sounds, can you not?" The chief priest rushed to find the king, and Ilyās ﷺ heard him say, "O my king, it is not the time for weeping and wailing; I have come to inform you that Ba'l demands your son; only when he is sacrificed will the idol begin to speak. Moreover, your son will return to life and thenceforth become immortal. Ba'l has communicated his will to a man of the people, and all the crowds are restless and waiting with growing impatience." Jezebel was not happy with this, but the high-priest convinced Ahab that as the boy had already died, it made little difference whether they buried him in the ground or brought him before the altar. The king rose and said to Jezebel, "We must do this, my dear, else the people will turn against us." So it was decided. He added, "And when my son is saved, I will invite Ilyās and all his followers to a great banquet ..." Ilyās ﷺ understood from this that his life was in danger, and he hurried from the palace. He hid his followers in a different location, and informed them that they were to leave the country and go seek safety in the kingdom of Judah. They were unhappy to leave their prophet behind, but he assured them they would meet again, and that it was the Divine Will that he stay to fulfill his mission. They parted from him with tears in their eyes and promises never to forsake their faith, ever.

Meanwhile the king and queen conveyed the body of their child to the temple, taking care to conceal the fact that he was already dead, and the priest took him and slit his throat upon the altar and painted the idol with his blood. They then took his heart and liver and stuck it into the idol's mouth, while all the people bowed down low in prostration, believing they were witnessing a sacred rite.

Ilyās' followers had left not a minute too soon, for they had hardly disappeared from sight, when the king's men came searching for them. They dared not touch the prophet himself, but they had orders to round up his followers, and they searched all the nearby caves. Finding no one, they called out to Ilyās ﷺ, "Help us, Ilyās, for if we return empty-handed, the king will have us beheaded." "You have your idol," answered Ilyās ﷺ, "why not cry to it for help?" The commanding officer stood and called back, "What is that idol going to do for us? It is not concerned with us and our poor lives!" "Ah," said Ilyās ﷺ, "how different is my God, the Lord of the Worlds, He is our Creator Eternal, and He cares for us, here and hereafter. If you believe in Him Almighty, you will attain safety and bliss in all eternity ..." "Is that all you have to say to us, O Ilyās? Do you think we can be put off with empty words?" And he gave orders for the archers to take aim and shoot Ilyās ﷺ. But the prophet ducked behind a boulder and they could not reach him with their arrows. At long last they gave up, and turned to go, but they were uncertain about their fate as they returned without captives.

They came at last to the precincts of the great temple, and there, to their greatest surprise they beheld a man who seemed to be Ilyās ﷺ, and they saw him in converse with the king and queen. The man was not bound or chained and he spoke freely. That they could not understand. They drew nearer, and heard him speak these words, "O people of Israel! The Lord has sent me to you to remind you of the covenant He made with your forefathers, and to renew your faith, but you have not accepted me, and cried me lies, calling me a magician and false prophet. You are openly disobedient and have turned to idol-worship,

the worst form of disbelief. For this the Lord of the Worlds is about to send punishment upon you: a long drought will come over this land, and a great famine in its wake. You will regret what you have done, but this chastisement is written against you for your sins. Turn to your idol, then, and see if it will deliver you from the famine, that is to come!" With that Ilyās ﷺ turned to go, and people made way for him to pass, for his speech had stunned them and they were afraid. He went towards the mountains and everyone stood watching him, until he had disappeared from view. As soon as he was gone, people returned to their senses, and all cried out at once, "What has happened, how is this possible? How is it we all stood still and lifted not a finger while he insulted our gods and threatened us with drought and famine? Whoever heard of famine in this abundant land? He must have bewitched us, so that we could move no limb, nor any tongue speak out against him!" King Ahab also came to, and immediately ordered another search party to go after Ilyās ﷺ and bring him back, dead or alive. The head-hunters went out and searched in the hills for Ilyās ﷺ, some armed with swords, others with bow and arrows. Each tried his best to mislead the other, for none was willing to share the promised reward with another. But they found no trace of the prophet whom Allah had hidden from their sight.

Ilyās ﷺ meanwhile continued his journeys through the land as a free man, and not as if he were a fugitive. It was very strange that he went and preached in every village, and for as long as he dwelt among them, nobody thought to lay hands on him; the thought never entered anyone's mind until he had gone. Then they remembered that their visitor had been Ilyās ﷺ, the very man the king was seeking for a high reward, and they rushed after him, but he had always already disappeared.

88 — FAMINE

IT WAS FOUR YEARS since Ilyās ﷺ had taken to living in the hills, and without Ilyās' influence at court the peace between Israel and Judah was again growing threadbare, misunderstandings becoming rife once more. The smaller kingdoms in the region of Shām were governed by greedy tyrants who ate up the rightful earnings of their peoples through the heavy taxes and duties they imposed, and the people groaned under the burden. Every year they thirstily awaited the onset of the winter rains, as suckling infants cling to their mother's breast. Secretly people feared that Ilyās ﷺ prophecy might come true, and that one year the rains would fail to come. They did not speak of this openly but it was a gnawing doubt in their hearts. They would pray to their gods and Ba'l to protect them from drought.

Then one year the autumn came, followed by the winter, then the days lengthened again, and yet there was not a sign of any cloud in the sky, and no wind blew in from the sea bringing moisture. The earth was bone-dry and cracked, and dry dust rose in the wind. The seed they had sown hopefully remained barren upon the dry soil and the birds picked it off the crust. The flocks found no more grazing pasture and returned hungry to the fold, and their milk dried up. Dire were the signs, but people were not without hope, for they knew Shām to be a green and well watered land that had never known famine. It was unimaginable to them that Shām, too, should be affected by the drought.

One season passed and not a drop of rain fell. Another winter came and went, dry and cold; spring followed, and the land of Shām should have been full of colour, but this spring put forth not a blade of green. The fresh shoots and buds dried up, young trees withered, and the newly born lambs died soon after birth. Ahab was well informed about these conditions in the land, but still he was unrepentant. He still lead search parties after Ilyās ﷺ, the sorcerer, as he called him, who had placed this curse on the land. People were not prepared for food shortages, having

known only days of plenty, and they stored nothing but gold which they could not eat. Now as food grew scarce, they had to buy provisions from passing caravans at exorbitant prices and their golden stores dwindled as they exchanged it for a bit of bread and water. The neighbouring kingdoms were never overly friendly with the Israelites, and now, as famine struck, they quickly sealed their borders to prevent migration of people fleeing the famine.

The third year broke, and still no rain fell. This time people had no more gold wherewith to buy food, so the caravans stopped traversing the land and no food was brought into Israel. Not a day passed without great ceremonies being performed at the temple of the great Ba'l, but as much as they cried and entreated the statue no sign, no voice, no help came from it. It continued to direct its unheeding stare into empty space, from all its four faces. As conditions became more and more constricted, all manner of crime and lawlessness spread, and safety vanished from the land.

Ilyās ﷺ was still seen here and there, and rumours of his passing through were rife, yet no one could say where he was at any given time. There was not a house in all of Israel that he had not visited in the course of his journeys. He would forever admonish the people of the household that their only hope lay in Allah Almighty, but still no one understood him. By the end of the third year of the famine people were desperate for food. "Give us bread!" people would entreat Ilyās ﷺ when he came to their house, and Ilyās ﷺ gave them bread, for he was given this miracle power. The smell of the fresh bread pervaded the neighbourhood, so it was well known at which house Ilyās ﷺ had stopped. But after people had eaten their fill, they forgot that they had been fed by a miracle, and rushed out again to hunt down Ilyās ﷺ in the hills.

Ilyās ﷺ was saddened at his failure to reach people's hearts, seeing it was only their stomachs that answered him. Thieves came in his wake to the houses he had visited, attracted by the smell of fresh bread, and they would press the people of the household to tell them where Ilyās ﷺ had gone, so that they

too might obtain some bread from him, but no one could ever say where he had gone to. As their hunger grew, so did their desperation, and it would happen not infrequently that these thieves and vagabonds would murder the whole household when they could extract no information. When the cold weather began again, people stripped the bark off trees and chewed it as wild animals do and scraped the moss off the stones. In the cities, people died of starvation, and the foul smell of the corpses poisoned the air and diseases began to spread. Many times people had not even the strength to bury their dead, and some even resorted to eating the flesh off corpses.

King Ahab appealed to the king of Judah for help, but this king was afraid to extend help to the godless whom Ilyās ﷺ had cursed, for fear of the same calamity befalling his own kingdom. From Sidon caravans were sent, but they never reached the capital of Baalbek, being intercepted by hungry brigands long before they got near. Jezebel blamed all their misfortune on the wrath of Ba'l, and ordered all the priests she had installed killed, saying they, too, were unsuitable for service. The hunger of the masses meant nothing to her, she cared only that the golden idol was maintained properly and regularly soaked in blood.

One evening Ahab sat by his window overlooking the city which looked like a ruined wasteland, lost in his dark reflections, and muttering to himself unawares. Suddenly Jezebel burst into the room, and angrily glared at him. "I have heard everything you said," she began and Ahab's heart quailed before her fury. "You think that the Ba'l statue is the reason for all our mishaps, as Ilyās has made you believe! Why then does the famine not affect other countries that worship idols? Have you not studied the history of kings? You should know that there can be a famine in any country from time to time, and after a while it passes. Now it happens to be our turn. Why do you not find this man Ilyās, he is the root cause of all our troubles! He it was who killed our son, and yet he lives. Until you bringt him to me bound to be sacrificed on the altar of the Ba'l, expect no favours from me, nor any sign of my love ..." Ahab replied,

"All my men are on the lookout for him, but no one is able to seize him." "You know as well as I do that they are not trying to bring him to you in chains, they seek him only so that he will give them a little bread. All the while he strolls on quite at ease, from house to house, hiding in caves and worshipping this invisible god. The anger of Ba'l will not be appeased as long as you suffer this man to live ..." So Ahab gave order to intensify the search for the prophet Ilyās ﷺ.

The next year of the famine began. There was a believer by the name of Obadiah who had remained in the city and came to see Ilyās ﷺ from time to time and gave him news. One day he came to Ilyās ﷺ and told him that he had heard that the king of Syria was forming an alliance with the smaller kingdoms along the borders of Israel and planning to attack the Israelites soon. "And what gain will they gather from this starving land?" asked Ilyās ﷺ. Obadiah answered, "We may be starving, but we still occupy the Promised Land." "Ah!" sighed Ilyās ﷺ, "that is a different matter; the guardians of the holy trust must be righteous, god-fearing people, otherwise the Promised Land has no meaning." "Have you given up all hope in the people of Israel?" asked Obadiah. "All the prophets Allah has sent before my time have been forced to wander homelessly, driven out and persecuted — why should I fare any better?" said Ilyās ﷺ despondently. Obadiah said, "O Ilyās, will you not pray to the Lord that this famine be lifted, perhaps people will then turn in gratitude to Him Almighty and return to the religion of our fathers. Take back your curse, O Ilyās." "I have never cursed anyone, that is their imagination entirely; for no prophet curses the people he is sent to — it would mean he has failed in his mission. Even in these evil days there live among us a handful of believers." "Will you not pray for that handful of believers, Ilyās, that Allah Almighty might send them provision from His bounty, for they are suffering as much as the rest. And what shall we do if we really are attacked?" Ilyās ﷺ told him to gather all the Muslims in the caves in the mountains where they had hidden once before. He told him also, "In this time it is more important to save Muslim lives than to sacrifice them

in the vain attempt of rooting out the evil of the Ba'l. They are too weak to destroy that idol now, and one Muslim life is worth more than will be won by losing it."

89 – THE DEEDS OF OBADIAH

OBADIAH SET OUT on the homeward journey. He came by a broken-down shack at the roadside, and as he passed he thought he heard the sound of sighing come from it. He paused to listen, and presently heard the voice of an old man sighing and talking to himself. He was saying, "If only I could know for sure ... There is a power, that is clear, and it is not the power of gold. Even if they took down all the stars from the skies and fashioned them into an idol, it would not be the Power that gives us life and death. I have searched far and wide, in all the lands of Israel, and I have found no one to give me an answer, all I have found is spiritual disease ... I have found nothing ..." And he wept. Obadiah went into the hut and greeted the old man he found inside. He asked him if he would accept a guest and the old man was glad for his company. "My name is Ishmara and I come from far away, but here in this accursed land nobody knows me. I am a widower and two months ago I set out with my six sons in search of something to still our longing which burns in our hearts like a great pain. We had heard that there is famine in this land, but we hoped to find something else here, a spiritual power and guidance, but, alas, we find that people here are worse and more corrupted than in our home. Now we are headed for Judah, as we have heard there is something there which is found nowhere else." Obadiah said to him, "I understand you well, my friend, you are looking to express your faith in the Eternal, and I have good news for you. There is no need for you to go to Judah, for there conditions are no longer what they were and should be, but here in this very land lives a prophet of Allah, and his name is Ilyās ﷺ. If it is destined I will take you to meet him, for he is a truly enlightened man. But he has endured much persecution and is forced to go into

hiding, for the king has issued a death warrant against him. So I will teach you what I can of his teachings, if it pleases you to listen, and may Allah bless this hour that we met." Ishmara was glad in his heart and embraced Obadiah, then he begged him to teach him, "For I am dying of thirst for sacred knowledge," he said. Obadiah spoke to him for some hours, and taught him the rituals of prayer.

After they had prayed together, Ishmara suddenly felt strengthened and young again, and he realised that it was his faith that gave him power and courage. He wished to be taken straight to the prophet Ilyās ﷺ, but remembered that he had to wait for his sons who had gone hunting. So Obadiah parted from Ishmara and left him to instruct his sons as he had taught him.

Obadiah continued on to the palace of King Ahab, and he became his favourite entertainer, for he knew many stories with which he distracted the king and queen from their worries. He became the king's favourite, and in time his chief and trusted vizier. One day as he passed the king's hall, he heard him say to his wife, "You are right; the anger of the gods has brought this famine upon us. As long as there are still followers of Ilyās alive in this land, there will be no rain. Let us round them up tomorrow and sacrifice them to Ba'l." "Yes," agreed the queen, "finally you are seeing reason. We must secure the idols' assistance, for the Syrians are preparing war against us, and Ilyās' henchmen will betray us for sure. We must purge the land of them first." Obadiah was troubled, because he could not leave the palace to warn the Muslims of the sword hanging over their heads, and he prayed in his heart to the Lord to show him a way. As he looked out the window he beheld a youth in hunter's dress approaching the gates, and he instantly recognized him as Ishmara's son, for he resembled the old man in a striking way. He led him to the queen, and the youth offered her as a gift what he had hunted that day. The queen received the gift with no special show of pleasure or thanks and did not even think to reward the young man. As he left, Obadiah drew him aside and asked him if he was indeed the son of Ishmara, and as

he was, Obadiah saw his prayer answered. He revealed himself to the young man and told him to go and warn the Muslims of the King's plans. He told him how the prophet Ilyās ﷺ had foreseen such an event, and instructed him to send the Muslims to hide themselves in the caves that they knew.

The next morning when the royal cavalcade had proceeded to the temple, and even the starving mob had clambered up the hill in order not to miss the spectacle, the only ones missing were the "sacrificial animals," that is to say the Muslims whom the soldiers were to have rounded up during the night. The commander arrived and went to tell the king that they had found no one in the designated houses, all had flown. The queen was furious and Ahab realized that a spy must have betrayed his plans. Obadiah had not left the palace, so they thought him above suspicion, but as they had to vent their anger on somebody, the king ordered the commander and his troops to be sacrificed instead. The angry mob fell upon them and tore them apart, and the idol drank blood that morning after all.

After the hunter had left his goods at the palace, the queen thought to herself and decided that it might be good to lodge these qualified hunters in the palace so as always to have access to their abilities and the fruits of their hunt. She sent Obadiah to find the man, and so it was that Ishmara and his six sons came to live in the palace. There was dining and feasting there every night in spite of the great famine throughout the land, and the queen was mostly unconcerned. Now while two of Ishmara's sons went out to hunt every day, the others spent their time digging a secret passage from the palace to underneath the place on which the idol stood, their intention being to hollow out the earth to such a point that the great golden idol would collapse and its fall be publicly seen. They patiently chipped away until the day of the great feast. By then the hollowed-out pit had grown so great that they could well expect it to collapse under the weight of the assembled crowds, and they warned Obadiah not to go there that day, if he could avoid it. Indeed, when the crowds were assembled and the priests were perform-

ing their heathen rites, all of a sudden a great rumbling noise was heard, the earth trembled and gave way, and the great bulk of the idol crashed into the cave below, burying beneath its bulk a great multitude of worshippers. There was a great outcry; people felt devastated that this catastrophe was added onto the famine they were suffering from so bitterly. The queen reproached the king for his stupidity in setting up the idol in an unstable place, and was not impressed when he told her that no man can know what is below the earth. Then they set about the repairs. They could find no way to lift the heavy idol from the trench, so they started to melt it down to gather the gold and mould it into a new and better form. The queen said, "I never liked its face anyway, it should have been a better image of my own." The prince of Shām came to them and said, "Is this the only idol that you have? It is not enough to have only one, there must be one in every single house — no need for all of them to be of gold — they can also be of copper, or of clay or of wood; the main thing is that they all resemble the chief idol in the image of the queen." The queen liked this idea and ordered it to be known and done throughout her domain.

One day Ishmara went to seek out Ilyās ﷺ on the mountain where he had always conversed with him, but he did not find him there, for he had again taken up his wanderings in the cities. He left bread in whichever house he visited, and for this reason people did not give him up to the police, for they were all starving, believers and non-believers alike. Also, it was part of the miracle of Ilyās ﷺ that as long as he stayed under a man's roof, no one in that house could lift a finger against him, everyone was as frozen. Only after he had gone did they regain their senses. This continued for a time, but one day when they asked him to give them bread and have mercy on them, the bread would not appear and people wondered at that. He explained to them that it was on account of the idols which were now placed in every house; the miracle would not manifest in a house which sheltered idols. Either they smash their idols or they would have no bread, he told them. Hunger was stronger than fear, so they began to smash the idols and Ilyās ﷺ gave them bread. When

news of this spread, the king issued a new decree: wherever the smell of freshly baked bread was detected, the police were to kill everyone in the house and burn down the property. In this way Ilyās ﷺ was prevented from helping the people even if they were unbelievers, and it was very hard for him.

From time to time Obadiah came to see him and the news he brought him was all bad, conditions were going from bad to worse and the number of Muslims was decreasing. The last time he came to see him was just at the onset of winter, and he said to him, Oh my prophet! I am satisfied with the task you have given to me, but it grieves me to see you in this sad condition, prevented from doing your duty. Have you not received any revelation concerning this?" "No, not yet," said Ilyās ﷺ. "But," said Obadiah, "if one day such an instruction comes and you leave this place, how shall I know where you have gone? Do leave a message for me under yonder stone, written on a piece of wood or bone." Ilyās ﷺ promised him to do so.

90 – ILYĀS ﷺ IN HIDING

When Obadiah had gone, Ilyās ﷺ returned to his prayer and in spite of all the bad news he had received, his heart was light and full of gladness. Soon he grew aware of a trembling and the awe that preceded every revelation, and the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ drew near. This time the angel ordered him to set out forthwith and go to the east to cross the River Jordan and find the valley of Jarīh, and there he should wait until the next revelation came to him. His provision would be sent of him. Ilyās ﷺ did not forget his promise, and wrote the name of the valley on a piece of bone and placed it beneath the rock he had shown to Obadiah. Then he set out on his road. He went east, but he knew not where to look for the valley of Jarīh, and he could trust no one to ask, forced to flee from all human beings he met along his way.

One day he awoke in a cave where he had spent the night, and opening his eyes he beheld a flock of sheep so thin and

starved that it pained his heart. The shepherd and his dogs were in a similar condition. Ilyās ﷺ raised his hand to heaven and prayed for them, "O Lord, bestow on this flock some of Your Mercy!" Then he set out on his way. After he had gone a little while he noticed that he was being followed. Turning around, he saw it was the shepherd of the flock he had prayed for a little while ago. "O father, will you not come and stay with me for a few nights!" called the shepherd. "What do you want of me, what makes you ask me that?" asked Ilyās ﷺ. "There is something special about you," said the shepherd, "for where you have stepped, the grass has sprung fresh and green, whereas all else is dry and fallow." Ilyās ﷺ looked and saw that it was true: wherever his foot had fallen, a green carpet spread out and betrayed the way he had come. He grew afraid of being followed, and said to the shepherd, "Go back to your flock, that carpet of green which you see will not fade away." The shepherd thanked and bade him farewell, then returned to his flock.

At last Ilyās ﷺ reached the River Jordan. Perhaps it was a coincidence. Perhaps it was divine ordainment that he overheard the conversation of two men and learned from it where to find the valley of Jarīh. He entered the valley and searched out the best place for himself to hide, then he set up his quarters there. He worried not about his provisions, for had not the Lord promised to send him what he needed? And indeed, every evening two crows would alight near the entrance to the cave, one leaving bread, the other meat for Ilyās ﷺ. In the morning they came again with his breakfast. He drank from the thin stream that ran through the valley of Jarīh.

But Ilyās ﷺ was not able to remain in his safe place for more than a few weeks, for the spies of Queen Jezebel were after him. They left not a place unsearched, and one group took the eastward road. Unfortunately one of these agents chanced upon the shepherd upon whom Ilyās ﷺ had spoken his blessing. He talked to him and interrogated him and tried to pry from him information about Ilyās ﷺ. But the shepherd was clever and did not answer right away, giving only evasive answers. He found a way to enquire of the soldier why they were looking for

Ilyās ﷺ. He explained to the shepherd all that had happened at Baalbek in the last three years, the famine, the fall of the idol, and how it was all the fault of Ilyās ﷺ. The queen had promised a great reward to the man who would deliver Ilyās ﷺ into her hands. The shepherd now knew all he needed to know and replied as before, "No such man passed this way, I know of no Ilyās." But the soldier looked about and noticed that there was something strange about the place, it was all lush and green while all else was dry and wasted. "You may say what you like, but I do not believe you; Ilyās must have passed by here, for all is green and that is a sign of his passing." And he tried to force the information out of the shepherd. All at once he had another idea, "What if I do away with the shepherd and appropriate his flocks? Who knows if the queen will make true her promise of great reward anyway, and besides it is a dangerous undertaking to try to lay hands on such a sorcerer as Ilyās." So he thought to himself. The shepherd also thought his own thoughts. "This life of a shepherd is not very prosperous — I would be much better off if I could get that reward: find Ilyās, bind him and bring him to Baalbek. But first I would have to get rid of this soldier-man." So they each thought of murdering the other and were waiting for an opportunity. But the shepherd was the cleverer man. He said, "Sit down and make yourself comfortable. I know how to play the flute, and I will play you a little tune, or two ..." The soldier sat down to rest and to listen, and the shepherd played him such strange and hypnotic tunes that the soldier forgot his intention of murdering the shepherd while he was engaged in his music, and instead fell in a swoon himself.

While the soldier was thus disarmed by his music, the shepherd suddenly changed his tune. At this new sound the sheep dogs lying nearby jumped up to attack the soldier and tore him to pieces. The shepherd kicked the dead body, and gleefully remarked, "Hey, soldier, it was your mistake to take me for such a fool as you were yourself. Do you not know that I read your intention long before from the glint in your eyes? You should have been more cautious ..." Then he left the man's remains lying in the sun, and set out to the east to find Ilyās ﷺ. He

ordered the dogs to follow Ilyās' ﷺ scent from the cave he had spent the night in; they sniffed and took up the trail.

After a few days they had reached the valley of Jarīh. The dogs crossed to the far side but returned, and continued to search along the floor of the valley. The shepherd understood that they had drawn near to the goal. Ilyās ﷺ watched also from his hiding place and could not understand the meaning of the dogs' behaviour. That evening the two crows did not appear as usual; Ilyās ﷺ thought at first that they had taken fright at the shepherd and the dogs, but then he remembered that it was upon the Command of the Almighty that the crows came to him every evening, and that if they failed to come it must be His Command as well. That night he did not lie down to sleep, but spent the whole night in wakefulness and worship.

91 — ILYĀS ﷺ ORDERED TO ZAREPTA

IN THE MORNING he saw the shepherd and his dogs moving away to the east, having failed to detect his hiding place, despite the dogs' keen sense of smell. Ilyās ﷺ understood that it was the work of the Lord. He went down to the stream in order to fill his water skin, and he found that the stream had dried up overnight. While he was still puzzling over all these signs, revelation came to him. He was to go to the town of Zarepta which is near Sidon, and visit an old widow who lived there. He remembered that Obadiah had often mentioned that town as being the birthplace of that malignant queen Jezebel, for her mother was there overcome with the pangs of birth before she could reach Sidon. He set out and intended to pass by his old cave on his way through the hills of Baalbek, as he had to pass there in any case. He thought he might as well leave another message there for Obadiah.

As he wandered along he was filled with the saddest thoughts. "What does it mean that it has not rained in this land for a full three years? Every other people would have turned to Allah for their salvation. But not here where they worship a golden

cow ..." When he crossed the border to the kingdom of Judah, he met and talked to a few people who knew him not, but this converse did little to brighten his mood. He was ashamed of being prophet to such a people. But then he quickly reminded himself that a prophet is not responsible for the wickedness of the people he is sent to, and he relaxed. Everything was intended as a lesson for mankind: for thousands of years the Lord had sent His prophets who endeavoured to teach man, and yet mankind had learnt nothing. Ilyās عليه السلام wondered about his task in the city of Zarepta and the old woman he had been sent to, and he trusted in the wisdom of the Lord, although he could not yet understand it.

After less than a week Ilyās عليه السلام arrived at his old cave. He dug up the old chip of bone he had placed there as a message to Obadiah and wrote new information on the bone, then he replaced it in the hole. He sat in his old cave until nightfall because it was dangerous for him to move through that region by day, and in this way he was forced to look upon the idol city of Baalbek. To his great disgust he saw that the idol had been rebuilt and set up anew on a different hill. "Ah, I have not been able to effect anything," he sighed to himself, "I am no Ibrāhīm عليه السلام that I could destroy the idols of this people who are a thousand times worse than the people of Nimrūd or Pharaoh." At night, just as he was preparing to leave his hiding place, he suddenly saw Obadiah who had come to this place under cover of darkness. Both were surprised to see each other, and Obadiah fell down in a prostration of gratitude. Ilyās عليه السلام did not understand, and Obadiah explained to him, "Only last night the commander in chief of your persecutors came to this cave. They found the piece of bone you had hidden here, and they have set out for that valley with a great force. They have replaced the bone in its place as a trap to find out if anybody has come to touch it. I have been sent here by the queen to verify the findings of the soldiers, for she was not satisfied." Ilyās عليه السلام said, "I understand. I have been to that Wadi and was ordered to return and to go on to the city of Zarepta in search of an old widow." Then he dug up the bone and broke it into such

pieces that could not be put together again. Obadiah said, "But Zarepta is known to be a very bad place, each man is divided against his brother, and a neighbour is enemy to his neighbour. However, the famine has not reached to that place, and if I remember correctly it is the birthplace of our wicked queen ..." "Yes, and the Lord Almighty has sent me to that place where such a monstrous and sinful creature first saw the light of day to find an unknown widow? How shall I achieve that?" wondered the prophet. His friend said, "You must know that in that place all women remarry, no matter what their age. If the Lord has sent you there to find a widow, there can be only one such woman who is unmarried, and so it will be easy for you. Leave a message with her for me, for perhaps I will come after you."

Ilyās ﷺ went on after having enquired about his old friend, the king. From what Obadiah told him he understood that the king was eaten with remorse and longed for his company, but that he would never be able to free himself from the clutches of that woman, and as Ilyās ﷺ had no intention of giving himself up, he passed on. He went on towards the sea. He sat upon a hill to watch the sunset, and there he indulged in morose and gloomy thoughts. "The believer," he thought, "is like that sinking sun. As it sinks into the sea and is hidden from view, so the believer is deceived by Shayṭān and his heart is darkened by the lies of the enemy. To drag down and drown the heart of the believer in the sewer of unbelief — that is his greatest joy." So he complained to himself as he sat and rested on a hilltop in view of the city of Zarepta he had been sent to. He took counsel with himself on how to proceed.

He was undecided whether to go down to the city that night or to wait till the morrow, then he remembered that Allah's Command is above all else, and that he should wait till he had clear signs. His life passed before his eyes, and he thought about his prophetic career and how little he had been able to accomplish. Most of the time he had been forced into hiding by the evil designs of the Queen Jezebel who held the king's heart firmly. For the last three years he had been hiding in caves and the land of Israel groaned under the famine. What was going

to become of it, how was life to go on? Would the last believers be drowned in the sea of idolatry, just as the sun that was about to sink in the Mediterranean Sea? He likened that sun to the idol of Baalbek, to a woman and to a cow, remembering the imagery King Ahab had used initially, the symbol of life-giving, and all of a sudden he took no more pleasure in watching the sunset, it seemed to him as if he were gazing at the golden abomination, and he turned his head away.

An old man was gathering leaves and roots into his bag nearby and muttering to himself, "O the rains, where are those rains that used to sweep away our flocks in great floods and cause our houses to crumble and fall — what happened that the colour green has taken offense and shows itself no more?" Man deems himself the owner of his fields, and he is but a guardian; there is no owner but the Almighty, and His is the whole Earth, and the Universe at large. As long as the people of Israel walked in the guidance of the Lord, He honoured them by bestowing upon them the title of 'ownership' of the Holy Land, but now they have fallen from that station; and as much as you might call the unbelievers rich, they are never blessed with that wealth, they are but the dogs of the guardian of His treasures. So thought Ilyās ﷺ to himself in his troubled mind, and before he knew it, he had come up to the man gathering his roots and weeds. The man was old but his eye was keen. "You look as if you had escaped from hell," he said to Ilyās ﷺ, "but know that you have reached a sea which is of poison, and even the seaweed cuts like a knife ..." "Yes, indeed, I have come here knowingly," said Ilyās ﷺ. "Ah, I see," said the old man, "you intend to go to Egypt from here, is it not so? But you must know also that even if you were to offer a sack of gold, no one would be willing to take you there, for the king of Sidon has closed all ports, as they are looking for a fugitive by the name of Ilyās ﷺ." Then he changed the subject, "I have been to Egypt, my son, and it surpassed even my expectations. The eyes of all the world are upon Egypt, and were they ever to stop chewing each other up they would fain lay hand on Egypt — Greeks, Macedonians, Persians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, all of them. And I have heard

another thing: in Ninive, the capital of the Assyrians, the king Sargūn is preparing to invade our country for a second time and to take advantage of our weakened condition on account of the famine." "And what would he find in this starved land?" "The land, the land itself, for the famine will not last a hundred years, will it?" "Has our king heard of this?" asked Ilyās ﷺ. "Does our king have eyes or ears for aught but the queen?" "I have crossed the land of Israel from east to west and north to south and I have heard nothing of this rumour that you have told me just now." "It is different with the kingdom of Judah, because they are bound to Egypt by payment of taxes and no king will take it up with Pharaoh so easily. But the Israelites are a different matter; they are independent and collect taxes from other kings and raid their neighbours. Perhaps the Assyrians are looking to take Israel in order to gain access to a seaport such as Sidon from which to set out for Egypt." The old man saw that his words were disturbing to Ilyās ﷺ, and he said, "It is only an hour's march down to the gates of the city, if you like we will go down together and spend the night within the gates." Ilyās ﷺ answered, "I think I prefer to spend the night outside the gates," and with that the old man departed.

After he had gone, Ilyās ﷺ was sorry, and still confused as to what he should do. For perhaps he could have influenced the old man and made him see the light of truth, what sort of a prophet was he? But then he remembered that he had been sent to look for an old widow in the town and for no one else. And what if the old man's words were true? What if Allah Almighty was preparing to inflict punishment upon the Banī Isrā'īl by means of the Assyrians, compared to which the famine would seem like a happy day? Then he looked up and saw that the sun was sinking quickly and was reminded that he must find shelter before nightfall for it would not do to be apprehended by the soldiers in the streets of the town and to be interrogated as to his identity. He thought, "Perhaps the Lord intends to save me from the Assyrians by ordering me to the shores of the Mediterranean? But no, I was sent here only because of an old widow, whom I must find, only then will I understand." This

thought lent speed to his step, but again he was held up by events along the road.

He passed by a hut in the valley, and upon closer inspection he saw that it was not a hut at all, but a mill. He heard from inside the sound of excited voices, of people engaged in an argument. One was saying, "So that old hag managed to trick you again, saying she would sweep up the place; she must have swept at least ten measures of flour from the millstones and pocketed them ..." Another voice replied, "But she worked at it from noontime onwards." "How much work can an old woman of a hundred years or more do?" "She is full of wisdom and tells wonderful tales ..." "Ah, you are crazy about her ravings, and you would sit and listen all day and give over to laziness completely," said the first man. "No, on the contrary, when this woman shows up, the number of customers increases of a sudden, and I have so much to do that I can hardly catch my breath. You have also noticed that." "That is but a coincidence, nonsense." "Oh, we shall see tomorrow, you have spoken unkindly to the woman and she vowed to come no more; we shall see who comes tomorrow. You have torn the thread of your livelihood with your own hands." The other man grew even angrier and yelled, "This cannot go on, our partnership must come to an end, we cannot work together anymore." "Right, I am ready, as we cannot seem to get along." "So it is true what the rumours say about you... I have heard you say yourself that you do not believe in the idols?" "What business of yours is it whether I worship idols or not?" said the other. "I shall go and report you to the police, for you have changed; ever since that old woman started coming to the mill and you began to talk to her — that was the beginning of all our misunderstandings. Did that old hag not say that tonight something was about to happen? Perhaps she was talking about your death, for I deem your blood to be lawful," and he recited what the old woman had said to them.

At that very moment Ilyās ﷺ burst upon the scene, for he feared it would come to blows, and he said, "I have overheard your quarrel and the verse you have recited, and I have come

to mediate between you, if you will forgive my intrusion." The believer said, "Welcome, and forgive my friend for his rough behaviour. At heart he is a good man, and we have known each other from childhood. If you wish to stay here overnight you are welcome. You are a stranger to these parts?" "Yes I am a stranger, but I have not come to stay overnight. I would like to ask you something, but I fear it will unearth your quarrel." "What is it? We will not quarrel again tonight." "You mentioned a certain old woman." "Yes," said the second miller, "and I like her not one bit." "Why do you not respect her old age?" "All right, but with her it is another matter, there is an unsolved secret about her which no one can fathom." "What sort of a secret is that?" "Even though she is over a hundred years old, she gave birth to a child four years ago; who ever heard of such a thing? She had a husband then who died a few months ago, and there is no doubt that she actually bore the child, for it was such an unusual event that everyone was around to watch the birth, and thus it was no question of her having stolen the child from somewhere." "So, the supreme power that makes all wishes come true has favoured this old woman," said the first miller. "Why do you not call it by its real name, magic and sorcery?" demanded the second. "I do not believe in witchcraft," he replied. Ilyās ﷺ said, "So the child's father has passed away? And what was his work?" "He used to do every sort of work he could find, and his name was Akhtub, Yakhtub, Ukhtub, Shafat, Shaphath — something like that. The woman's name is forgotten, everyone just calls her 'old crow'. The child's name is Alyasa' (Elisha), but he is usually called the 'son of the old crone'." Ilyās ﷺ said, "I am very interested in meeting this old woman." The first miller was eager to describe her house to him, "If you pass into the city by the south gate, there turn into the first street to the left, and knock on the third house." The second miller warned him against her, "But don't stay there as her guest, for she will do to you what she has done to my friend: she will twist your head with her words, for she has a persuasive way about her, and of late she has been giving only gloomy tidings. She comes every day and sweeps clean the mill floor and

picks up every grain." "But," said the other, "what she takes home for herself and for her son is after all only a very small amount, and a lot of customers come to us on her account."

Ilyās ﷺ was wondering if this old woman could be the one he had been sent to seek out. He asked, "Is there any woman in this town older than she, or any other widow?" "Is she not old enough? Also you must know that in this town every woman, no matter how old, remarries. She buys herself a husband with her money, and none of them content themselves with widowhood. That woman is the only one remaining unmarried. And who knows, may be even she will remarry sometime soon ..." The first miller smiled at his friends' words and he continued, "Yes, you may smile at what I say, but I tell you, that woman has absolutely nothing in her house but her son, and yet I would not put it past her if one day she would trick you into marrying her ..." The first one laughed and said, "You may suspect her of all manner of things, but not that, my friend, never." Ilyās ﷺ however had heard enough and took leave of the two friends and went on towards the city. The sun was nearing the horizon and he feared that the gates of the city would soon be shut for the night, so he put on a pace.

92 – THE WIDOW OF ZAREPTA AND ILYĀS' ﷺ MEETING WITH HER

AN OLD WOMAN stepped out into the street, supporting her bent back with a staff and carrying a rope and hatchet at her waist. She made for the south gate as quickly as she could move. A window opened and two young women looked out from it. They called to her in jest, "O old crow, it seems you have become a street-walker, what drives you out of the house again when you have just returned a short while ago?" The old woman took no offence and answered gently, "I returned home with my two handfuls of flour just to find that there was no wood left on which to cook. Why do you not come and help an old woman?" The young women broke out into peals of

laughter. "That is only an excuse," they said. "This rope and hatchet are my witnesses," replied the old woman. "Ah, but what about the child you bore a few years ago, where did that come from?" "There must be a hidden wisdom in that ..." said the old woman. "Wisdom indeed! Witchcraft, what else? Is it not a shame for that young child of yours? Who knows what sorcery you will yet work, perhaps you will get our husbands to divorce us and to marry you in our stead ..." they laughed. "But you must hurry, for the gates are closing at this hour, and you will freeze to death out there in the cold ..."

The old woman went on. In spite of the hurtful words the women had spit at her she felt an inexplicable gladness in her heart as she went on her way. She examined the horizon and thought to herself, "What is it with me? I might have scratched and dug up a few old roots from my courtyard, they would have been slow in burning, but I need not have left the house in that case. I cannot understand what drives me out; can it be only the hope of finding a few twigs that have washed up upon the shore that is deceiving me? But no, I do not believe that is all there is to it. This is the first time since my husband has died that I feel gladness in my heart, I feel as if something extraordinary is about to happen; or is it the hope of being the first to espy a few clouds on the horizon? It is now the third year that has passed without rain, and we are moved into a deadly cold and dry winter. And I have left my child alone in the house. Let not my enemies take advantage of this, for there are many who are envious of me. When I first was pregnant with him, what did they not say? Your child will be lame, he will be deaf, he will not live a month ... and now he has grown into a good, strong lad, and nothing is wrong with him, so people are livid. O Allah, I take my refuge in Thee, You have always protected and shielded us, and always our enemies have been proven wrong, do Thou protect us this time as well. If not for me, who is left in the entire city who holds to the faith and the law of Mūsā ﷺ? In every house there are idols and they worship any variety of things. People believe that I go to the miller's to beg for flour, but in truth one can survive quite well without bread, and people can live by

chewing bark and wood and leather, even sucking on metal. What keeps man alive is the heart's contentment. I go to the mill to converse with the miller, because I am quite convinced that he is a secret believer, although we have never openly spoken about this. We communicate our feelings to each other, and are united in the light of faith. O Lord, accept my thanks and my prayers! In my old age I prayed to You to give me a child, and You answered my prayer without delay. I cannot even say why it is that I prayed to You thus, suddenly this strong wish arose in me, in spite of all reason, perhaps because there was not one male Muslim left in this town, perhaps that was what prompted my prayer. Now he is already four years old."

While she was thinking these thoughts to herself she had approached the city gates and another woman called out to her, "O old crow, where are you going alone at this time of night, leaving your small child by himself? Surely it is your infatuation with that miller that is driving you about, shame on you! If you only had half as much love for the idols, your husband would not have died, and you would not have had to suffer the disgrace of being the only unwed woman in town!" The mother of Alyasa' gave no answer to this offensive speech, but it served to bring back the memory of her late husband, and she saw him so vividly in her mind as if he were standing in front of her. He had been a true believer up to his last breath and he traced his lineage back to Yūsuf ﷺ through Ephraim. She had implored him time and again that they should leave this town in which the dark night of godlessness had spread so densely, that they should go and settle in Jerusalem, near to the holy places, but he had always refused for reasons unknown even to himself, and he had said, "It is no great thing to remain true to one's belief in the midst of the believers, but to remain steadfast in the heart of trouble, and to stand firm, that is of much greater merit." So the woman had given up her resistance at last and followed her husband.

Now she had reached the gate and met the keepers of the watch. They knew her and saw she had rope and knife with her and asked her, "Where are you going? The sun is about

to sink in the sea, and the night watch is on its way, in a few minutes we will shut the gates, so what is your business now?" "I just need to go out for a few minutes to cut some wood, it will not take me long." "Why did you not think of this on your way home?" "It slipped my mind." Then one of the watchmen grinned and said, "We will let you go if you tell us one of your stories." "But then I will certainly be too late." "We will leave word with the oncoming watch so that they will let you in." The mother of Alyasa' leaned her back against the wall, resting for as moment and sighed, "Oh, you young people, what do you know; it does not even occur to you that there is someone waiting for me at home!" "You may forget him for a while, he must get used to it!" The woman was hurt by his words, but she did not show it. Instead she began to speak what came to her mind. "The late fruit of a mature tree may be long in coming, but its sweetness is enduring; you ask me why? and I will say it is for that the tree has gathered all manner of blessings from the earth along its long life into its veins, and has stored them in its honey combs. How then should it be otherwise, when it finally pours all this sweetness into its one and only fruit?" But the watchmen understood nothing of her speech and said, "What is this talk of honey and fruit in a time of drought and famine? Tell us something that will amuse us and make the last minutes of our watch pass more quickly. We understand that you are not in a good mood today for you are worried only about how you shall feed that cripple of a son of yours with that bit of flour you have scrounged from the mill today ..."

While they were yet talking, latecomers came to the gate into the city, and the watchmen were kept busy doing their job of scrutinizing the passing folk. The old woman looked down the road and saw a man approaching, and as soon as she saw him, she felt strangely stirred. She recognized that he was a stranger to the town, and she knew what a stranger had to endure from the ruthless guards: they would rob him before he even reached the town, and she thought of how she could prevent this. The watchmen had completed their inspection and noticed that the old woman was still standing by, and they turned to her, say-

ing, "O old woman, what are you waiting for, we have already given you leave." The mother of Alyasa' came to her senses, and before she knew what she was doing she said to the guard, "I am looking at that stranger who is approaching the gate, it seems to me that I recognize him, he is a relative of my late husband; he must have just heard of his death — I was not expecting him to come." The guards believed her, and one of them joked, "Now for whom will you cook a meal of that handful of flour you have collected?" The woman said, "I never thought of that yet, but what will feed two people will also be enough for three. Now do let me go, and I will collect some wood with his help and then I must hurry home."

The old woman went along, picking up bits of wood from the side of the road, not losing sight of the stranger who was steadily drawing closer. She was lost in thought. What had prompted her to say that the stranger was a sort of relative to her? How was she going to justify herself on the Day of Reckoning? Was it her sincere intention to save that stranger from injustice that made her invent that story? Thus she pondered to herself. Finally she came face to face with Ilyās ﷺ and made ready to introduce herself to him, but he was quicker than she, and took her knife and rope from her, saying, "Let me help you gather wood, O mother," and he quickly cut some branches, tied together a bundle and carried it for her. Along the way she then said to him, "You are a stranger here, what be your name?" He told her he was Ilyās ﷺ, the son of Yasīn. "And why have you come to this place?" "I have been ordered to come here." "And who are your forefathers?" "I am of the sons of Israel." "Ah, so was my deceased husband," said she, "his family's lineage can be traced back to Yūsuf ﷺ, while yours can be traced back to Hārūn ﷺ, so I have told no lie, you are indeed related to my husband through Ya'qūb ﷺ." She explained to him the situation at the guard house. "You have done great good by me," said Ilyās ﷺ, "but why?" "I do not know, O my son, I cannot say, it just arose within me."

They came to the sentry post and the men just waved them on, asking no questions of Ilyās ﷺ. Thus he passed safely into the town. They had gone but a hundred yards, when they

reached the woman's house. Ilyās ﷺ already knew that this was the woman he had been sent to seek out, and he turned to bid her goodnight. But she would not let him go and invited him into her house. "Are you sure I will be no trouble for you?" "On the contrary, you will bring light into our house. Do not worry about food, we have enough for the three of us." "That is not what I meant to say, O my sister; throughout these years of famine, the Lord has not made me cause hardship for anyone in whose house I stayed." The old woman had now made up her mind, "O Ilyās, it is now the third time that you have mentioned the name of our Lord, and I know that you are an important servant of the Lord; I cannot leave you to the mercy of these animals in human guise out there, you must come and stay with me."

So he consented and they went in. The boy was on the balcony watching the dolphins play in the sea. Ilyās ﷺ asked, "What is the boy's name?" She said, "His father called him Elisha, that is Alyasa', and it means in Hebrew, 'Eli' — Allah, and 'sha' — may he be acceptable, please God; may this son find favour in the eyes of the Lord, and may a good lot be written for him. In this sense I have understood the name." "That is good, for his father could not be sure he would live to see his son grow up, since he was born at such a late stage." In time the name Elisha changed, and in the Qur'ān it is referred to as Alyasa', as the Qur'ān was revealed in the dialect of the Quraysh.

The woman said, "Go and talk to my son who is on the balcony while I go to the kitchen and fix us something to eat." Ilyās ﷺ answered, "Do not trouble yourself on my account, for the Lord has never let me go hungry in all these years of famine." Suddenly the old woman understood, and clapped her hand on her forehead. "How stupid of me not to realise before! You are the prophet Ilyās whom they are looking for, the prophet who is making war on the idolaters as Baalbek, and who leaves bread in the houses of those that he visits. I have been expecting you, now I know that it is true." "Then you know I have come on command of the Almighty." "They are searching for you everywhere for they are blaming you for the famine and they

want to kill you and string you up, you are in grave danger." "It is not my doing," said Ilyās ﷺ, "it is a punishment from the Lord for their disobedience, but that they do not understand. I have never cursed a single soul." "Still, you must not leave my house, for only here you are safe." "O mother of Alyasa', know this: no prophet can go or make any move unless by the Command of the Lord Almighty — he cannot leave and he cannot stay without that order. I have been ordered to this town to find you, an old, widowed woman; I have found you and have not yet received another revelation. Nor have I any knowledge of when the drought will end."

Then she called to her son to come and greet the uncle come to visit them. "I wanted so much to be called the mother of Alyasa', but instead they call him after me, the 'son of the old crone'. The boy came over and gave his greetings to the 'uncle' and gazed at him for a long while. At long last Ilyās ﷺ said to him, "Soon it will be dark and you will not be able to watch the fish, so go and enjoy the spectacle now, O son of a beautiful mother." The boy answered, "O uncle, you are the first person to ever address me in a pleasant way, everyone else calls me only bad names, 'son of the old bag' and so on, as if I were the cause of my father's death. It is the first time I have been called by a good name." "It is all right, son," said Ilyās ﷺ, "no matter how old a mother is, she will always be beautiful to her child. Now go back to your fish." The boy replied, "I love three things, Allah, my mother, and the dolphins (the fish of Yūnus ﷺ)." Ilyās ﷺ replied, "*Inshā'Allāh* you will grow up and you will have a son and you will call him Yūnus!"

The next day the old woman said, "I must be off now to do my work at the mill so that we may have something to eat at night. Now Alyasa', be a good boy and don't be a bother to uncle." Ilyās ﷺ said, "No need for you to go, for from this day on your flour bag and oil jug will never be empty." She went and looked in the larder, and found that all he said was true. Before long, the miller knocked on her door, carrying with him a small bag full of flour, and said, "O mother, as you did not come today I thought you were ill, or that you had taken my friend's

words to heart, so I came to look after you and have brought you some flour." "May Allah be pleased with you," said the old woman, "but a relative of my husband's as arrived," and she introduced him to Ilyās ﷺ.

Now the famine had become so severe that the insects began to chew up the rope that held the bucket of the well. Every day when she went to draw water, she had to let down another length of rope, for the insects had eaten their way through it.

93 — ILYĀS ﷺ HEALS THE WIDOW'S SON AND DEPARTS

AFTER FORTY-SIX DAYS of their association, the boy Al-yasa' suddenly fell ill, and was seized by a violent attack of fever. Nothing they did for him had any effect and none of the neighbours gave any help at all, they had only harsh, unkind words for her. "Serves you right for giving birth to a child at this age, better he dies anyway, he is not normal, and a cripple in any case," they said. One day she came home from one of her forages and found Ilyās ﷺ sitting hunched together in a corner, and she understood that something must have happened. She looked and found that her son was lying as dead. She let out a long wail, then she said, "At least he lived long enough to meet the prophet of Allah." Ilyās ﷺ confessed to having loved Alyasa' as if he had been his own son, and that he was very special to him. Then they picked him up and laid him in the other room, and as Ilyās ﷺ laid him down, he noticed that the boy was yet breathing, ever so slightly. He stood and prayed to the Lord and raised his hands in supplication. He entreated the Lord to let the child live and to make him one of His special servants. When he was done praying, the boy suddenly opened his eyes, looked about, and seeing Ilyās ﷺ, he said, "Uncle, I am hungry." Then he jumped from his bed as if he had never been ill, and ran to his mother to get something to eat.

That night revelation descended upon Ilyās ﷺ, and he began to tremble and sweat, and in the morning he said to the mother and son, "I have been ordered to leave from here and I must go wherever the Lord directs me, this very night." They were happy and sad at once, and Ilyās ﷺ took to the road towards Samaria.

At the king's palace there had been no news of Ilyās ﷺ for a long while. Obadiah who had meanwhile become one of the chief viziers, was very worried about his friend and prophet. The king ordered him to go out in search, and he too went out in disguise to comb the land for Ilyās ﷺ. But he found nothing. The famine continued, and the trees were drying up from the roots, the whole land was dying. Obadiah went out and Allah arranged his ways so that he suddenly chanced upon Ilyās ﷺ. They embraced and were glad, and exchanged news. "They are still on the lookout for you all over the land in order to put you to death," said Obadiah. "I am come here by Divine Command," said Ilyās ﷺ, "go to the king and tell him to come and meet me here, by himself, for the Lord has ordered me to say certain things to him." Obadiah said, "I will go, but if I do not return do not be worried, for the king himself has also set out in search of you, and he may be out of town." Ilyās ﷺ waited. Obadiah went and met the king. "I have found Ilyās," said he. "So where is his head?" cried the king. "No," said Obadiah, "I have not brought his head, it was not possible; he wishes to speak to you, and asks you to meet him in such and such a place." The king answered, "I am the king; he must come to see me, and not the other way." But the king forgot that he had promised a great reward to any person who would bring him Ilyās ﷺ, dead or alive.

Obadiah went and found Ilyās ﷺ who had meanwhile sheltered in the house of a young brave who had embraced Islam and who was the most excellent marksman of his day — he could shoot down even the flies in the air — and Ilyās ﷺ accepted the king's invitation. They fixed a day to meet at the great temple. Ilyās ﷺ ordered the believers to come and mingle among the crowd of spectators.

94 – ILYĀS ﷺ MEETS WITH KING AHAB AND THE END OF THE FAMINE

ON THE APPOINTED DAY, Ilyās ﷺ arrived at the temple accompanied by his warrior servant. He addressed King Ahab and said, "This is now the fourth year of the famine, have you no mercy on your people? See how they are suffering, they are but skin and bones; the only fat ones are your courtiers and close associates. Is it not a shame that they should be made to suffer on account of your obstinacy, for that you refuse to believe in Allah Almighty and despise His Name and persecute His prophet? Come, and repent, and the people will follow you. Destroy this abomination of an idol and rescue your people from destruction! As long as you continue in your misguided ways, not a drop of rain will fall on this land." Ilyās ﷺ spoke and no one could lift a finger against him, and again they were striken with wonder at this and attributed it to some magic. This condition continued for some days. At last Ilyās ﷺ said, "You are intent on trying the Lord; pray then to your idol and do what you will, and I will pray to the Lord Almighty. Then we will see who will bring the blessed rain." This challenge they accepted. The 4000 priests of the idol assembled and performed all sorts of ceremonies, but to no avail, no rain fell. Then Ilyās ﷺ said, "Now I will pray to the Lord." He prayed, then he sent his servant out to the top of a hill to see if there was any cloud in sight. He went and returned, and had seen nothing. So he sent him out again a second and a third time, and each time the sun was hotter, and the heat rose as if from a sheet of metal, and still there was not a cloud in sight. But Ilyās ﷺ did not falter or give up, even a fourth and a fifth time, and people began making fun of him for sending the poor man out in vain and to his death from heat exhaustion, and were convinced that no rain cloud was going to appear. Ilyās ﷺ addressed the people and told them that it was a test from the Lord, and that he would send the man out seven times before a cloud would be seen. The cloud would seem at first to be

no more than a wee speck on the horizon, but would soon grow until it filled the whole sky. "And that," he said, rising to his feet, "will expose your thread-bare beliefs in all their nakedness." The priests still made fun of him, "This time your magic didn't work, O Ilyās, prepare then for your doom." "Allah alone knows who will die, and when and how," answered Ilyās ﷺ.

It happened as Ilyās ﷺ had predicted. The seventh time, his man came running up and reported having seen a tiny speck of a cloud on the horizon. It grew and grew until it covered the whole land, and then it began to rain out of season. Overnight the land was soaked, it greened and sprouted forth new growth as had not been seen before in the land. The trees brought forth green leaves and blossom, the dry wells filled to the brim, the streams began to flow once more, with such force that they could not be brooked, and there was water, blessed water everywhere. Ilyās ﷺ turned to the people and said, "Forget not your promise, destroy the idols which you have in your houses, follow the example of Ibrāhīm ﷺ." The people nodded, but they were a people fond of bargaining, so they thought to themselves, "Let us wait first and see what is the outcome of this, perhaps it is just another bit of magic." News spread throughout the land that the famine was over and the flocks would multiply tenfold that year, and crops would be plentiful as never before. But no-one thought of keeping his promise to Ilyās ﷺ, and his hopes were not fulfilled.

At last he went to the king's palace and spoke to him. "Ahab," he said, "how long will you wait until you make good your promise to me and give the order?" Ahab was heavy-hearted and anxious. "Give me another week to think about it," he said, "until the queen comes back and sees what has happened with her own eyes." "Is it not enough that it happened before your own and all the people's eyes? What will change within a week? You are again falling back on your promise. Had I lost in the contest you would not have hesitated to put me to death, would you?" "I gave orders to put to death the 4000 priests who betrayed me, I had them thrown into the fire." "That was not

our agreement! You were not to shed human blood, you were to destroy all the idols. When the queen returns, she will only turn your head around again and convince you that it was by the help of Ba'l that all this was done, and you will be as wax in her hands. But know, O Ahab, it has been revealed to me: your doom has been decreed. On account of your persistent unbelief and faintheartedness, chastisement will come upon you from the east and northeast that will make the three years of famine seem like a time of joy and hilarity. You will bring disaster upon your people, but you and the queen will not live to see the full extent of it." Confronted with this blatant prediction, the king was dumbstruck and could not even give an order to the guards. So Ilyās ﷺ and his servant passed out of the palace unscathed and were gone.

Four days later the queen returned, and seeing the land green and in bloom she said, "You have me to thank for that, I went to my father's court and there found the means of breaking the spell which Ilyās ﷺ had cast over the land; let us go to the Ba'l and bring sacrifices and ceremonies of thanks, for his power released us from the great famine." She found the king in a mood of heaviness and gloom, and he told her why. "Why did you not wait for me to come? I was not that far away." "But I did wait for you," said the king who trembled before his wife's anger, "I did not give orders to destroy the idols before you came back. I only had the priests put to death."

King Ahab then issued orders for great ceremonies to be held in honour of the idol, for the queen had come back and broken the spell. The people were deceived and quickly forgot what they had suffered during the three years of famine, and deemed their blessings to be lasting. But the king's depression and gloomy spirits continued, and one night the queen extracted his secret from him. He told her the parting words of the prophet. The queen said, "Leave it up to me and let not your heart be heavy. How can you believe the words of that madman? I will have him hunted in the whole land and then he will be made to pay for the death of those 4000 blameless priests who were murdered through his deception."

The king agreed to every thing she said, and he very nearly surrendered his reign to her, for she possessed a very forceful personality, while he was no more than a puppet. She organized a secret police force and a network of spies, and received news from every corner of the country, she had eyes and ears everywhere. In a short time she had even made herself popular in the land, for people quickly forget.

95 – JEZEBEL'S WILES

AFTER A WHILE she found that the kingdom of Israel was not big enough and she coveted also the kingdom of Judah and sought to annex it. She convinced Ahab that it was not right for two tribes to hold the whole of that land, while they lived with the other ten tribes on the other side of the border. She exerted her influence over the king until he consented. She suggested that he invite the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, and his whole family to his court to show him what the power of their great idol had brought them, and to try and convince them to abandon their old faith. Her strategy was to 'take the fortress from within'. Jehoshaphat and his royal family came at the invitation of King Ahab. He was given the best treatment and they tried all they could to convince them of the excellence of the Ba'l, but Jehoshaphat was unimpressed. Wherever they took him he raised his hands to heaven and prayed to the Almighty, saying, "O my Lord, You have shown these people so many of Your signs and yet they persist in their unbelief. O My Lord, how hard of heart are these people that they learn no lesson from the ancients and live under the tyranny of their imaginings ..." One evening after a banquet he addressed the assembled court and tried to call them to reason, invoking the memory of their great prophets and kings, and inviting them to join in the service of the true Lord and to reunite in the stewardship of the Holy Land. That night Jezebel came down hard on her husband, saying, "Why is it that you gave no answer to that Jehoshaphat, but sat there like a ragdoll! In effect you confirmed his speech

through your silence. In your heart you are not really attached to Ba'l, and I am expending all my efforts in vain — you are in truth my greatest enemy, right by my side!"

The king was so spellbound by this woman and so terrified of losing her that he would make any promise just to keep her. He said, "I thought that you were going to answer him, for you know that I have left all affairs of state up to you ..." "All right then, I will answer him," she said. The next evening she spoke. "O king of Judah, you are relying on the help of the Egyptians, but that is a grave mistake; for where is Egypt in relation to here? Far, far away. If the kings of Syria and Assyria unite against you, you will be helpless against them, and wait in vain for assistance to come from Egypt." King Jehosapath replied briefly but succinctly, "I fear not any power on earth, I fear only the Lord of the Universe who has brought all this into existence out of nothingness. I am an old man. All I can hope for now is that I may be able to turn over my kingdom and the sacred trusts which I have received from my forefathers to my son, and that I may die a believer. Allah Almighty has not sent a prophet among us, for we stand united in the faith, but He has sent the prophet Ilyās ﷺ among you. He prophesied the famine before it came to pass, and his words came true, then he foretold its end and that too has come to pass. Why then do you still not believe? I have heard yet another thing: the prophet has told King Ahab that he has one more chance; if he fails to reform, his life and his kingdom will be wrenched from his hands."

The queen had a lot more to say, but she realized it was better to resort to treachery and deceit than to open argument. She smiled sweetly at the king, and said, "Let us bury our differences and continue on the path of friendship. Let us open our borders and become as one nation; that way we will drive away the menacing beasts from our door" — meaning the Syrian and Assyrian armies. The king accepted this, after all there had been no fighting between them for many years. Also he wished for good neighbourliness.

Jezebel resorted to her wiles. Ahab had a daughter from another wife, and she called her Mugu, a most beautiful girl. Je-

zebel arranged for this girl to be married to the prince who was to succeed his father on the throne of Judah, and the match was arranged. When the time of the wedding came, the girl said, "But I will not leave off the worship of Ba'l, and I will not marry you if you do not join me." The prince was unlike his father and he regarded this as a small matter, so he agreed to the girl's demand. However, he said his father would not let him, perhaps if he renounced the throne. But in this case the girl would not have him. So they took counsel again and told the girl to pretend to agree to follow the prince's religion. This she did, and they were to be married. But Jehoshaphat insisted that it be the holy prophet Ilyās عليه السلام who perform the marriage ceremony according to the rites of Mūsā عليه السلام, so word was sent out to find the prophet. The evening came, and Ilyās عليه السلام came to the palace. He was always a sweet-tongued prophet, and he spoke not a word of reproach to Jezebel or the king Ahab. They conducted all the rites according to the custom of the times, concerning the dowry and the bridal gifts. Then Ilyās عليه السلام concluded the bond of marriage, and a date for the wedding feast was fixed within a month, and it was to be a splendid week of celebrations in both kingdoms.

That night when Ilyās عليه السلام left the palace grounds he was lost in his thoughts. Obadiah accompanied him as far as the city walls, and Ilyās عليه السلام said to him, "There is much in this affair that is hidden from our eyes. The unbelievers are preparing their final attack on the faithful, but it will avail them nothing against the Almighty. My heart is heavy as I foresee their end." "So have you prayed for their destruction?" asked Obadiah. "No, I would never do so with impunity, and He is the One who Sees, who Hears all." Thereafter Ilyās عليه السلام again took to wandering in the hills.

Jezebel was indeed scheming to trick Judah into the worship of Ba'l through the marriage of Ahab's daughter to the son of Jehoshaphat. But King Jehoshaphat was no fool. He realized her intention, and he knew also that his life on earth was drawing to a close. He tried his best to hold his people to the straight path, but he knew that his son had not his own moral

determination. The queen Jezebel had made lawful all things forbidden in Israel, licentiousness and depravity had become as commonplace in the kingdom as they were in the land of Egypt, so much so that no woman knew for sure who was the father of her child. All this was a result of the worship of Ba'l, the abomination. Ilyās ﷺ sat in his cave and wept, from shame for his people and from the sense of his own failure as a prophet. The angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to him and comforted him, and Ilyās ﷺ took up his wanderings through the markets and towns once more, exhorting his people and warning them of the evil about to befall them. But no one heeded him, even the king and queen ignored him now, he was tolerated as a harmless madman.

One day, however, the prophet suddenly came upon Ahab and Jezebel as they were sitting in the palace gardens enjoying the breeze. He strode up to them without greeting, waving his staff in the air, pointing to the northeast. "From there your punishment will come," he cried, "from there cometh the avenger, and you will perish and with you the people you have misguided for so long. You shall have not even a grave, the dogs will devour your flesh. The Wrath of Allah is unleashed against you, so beware!" Before they had overcome their surprise, Ilyās ﷺ was gone. They sent out men to search for him, but as before, he could not be found.

Ilyās ﷺ had stormed out into the desert in his righteous rage, and went as far as Beersheba, determined to leave that land of the godless once and for all. But revelation came to him at Quraba and he was sent back by the Lord, for a prophet cannot dismiss himself from his obligation to his people.

96 — THE INVASION OF SARGŪN THE SECOND

NOW IN NINIVE, the capital of the Assyrians, Sargūn the Second was king. His people too were idol-worshippers. Their idol had the king's head, an eagle's wings, the body of an ox and the mane of a lion. Sargūn was a descendant of Nimrūd, and as

every king of his time he had his eyes on the fertile valley of the Nile, that is to say, on Egypt. It was his dream to rule one day over that land. But in between lay the lands of Syria and Israel and these would have to be taken first. The northern kingdom of Syria was already subjugated, the Assyrians levied their taxes on it. The question remained of securing Assyrian rule over Israel to clear the way for an invasion of Egypt, without disturbing the kingdom of Judah which was in alliance with the Egyptian king and under his protection. Sargūn wished also to forestall the Persians who might have had similar designs, once they asserted their dominion over Anatolia.

One day his vizier informed Sargūn of all these developments and explained to him in minute detail what were the conditions in Israel. The king scratched his beard which was braided into a hundred tiny plaits. It sounded to him as if Israel was a small bite that could be swallowed with no difficulty. It was decided that they would launch a friendly invasion into the territory and play along with the King and Queen for a while, to trick them into trusting in Assyria's friendship. That would be easier and less costly than making war on them. "We will give to them whatever they wish," said Sargūn, "they shall have the impression that they never led such a good life before. We will leave them their king and queen, and only take possession of the land as a formality. But can the land sustain such a great army as ours?" "According to my informants," answered the vizier, "the land is so heavy with fruit that the boughs are breaking with their load. There is no scarcity of provision there." "But what of those large Mediterranean women; will they be pleased with our men?" "Let that not worry you, O my king, the women there are so insatiable that they have even set up male brothels. They will be only too happy to come into the tents of the Assyrians for a change." And so the matter was concluded.

A fortnight later news of Assyrian troop movements reached King Ahab and his queen in their palace and Ahab was quite shocked. He had not expected the prophet's words to come true, and he remembered what Ilyās ﷺ had said about their final outcome. Sargūn crossed the Euphrates, and Ahab had

no military force that he could set against such a mighty army of conquerors. It was useless to appeal to the Syrians, for they were already vassals to the Assyrian king, and in all of Judah there was no army to match. Ahab was desperate, and Jezebel flew into a rage, "Do something," she cried, pulling the king's beard, "I do not wish to be dragged from my throne!" "The best thing would be for us to find Ilyās ﷺ and appeal to him for help. We will promise to destroy the idols and he will pray to prevent this disaster," said Ahab. "Never!" cried Jezebel and began to kick and stamp the floor, "Ba'l is the embodiment of my eternal existence, I will never permit him to be destroyed!" And she ordered the priests to do penance to appease the anger of Ba'l and to bring sacrifices. So once again a great number of innocent victims were sacrificed to the idol, and its courtyard was soaked in blood.

The army of Sargūn advanced steadily. Jehoshaphat sent a message to Ahab. "Let this be your final warning," he wrote, "and return to the faith of your fathers and forefathers — the law of Mūsā ﷺ and Hārūn ﷺ. If you wish, I will intercede on your behalf with the king of Egypt who is my friend." This course of action seemed reasonable to Ahab, but Jezebel had her way. "Perhaps the Assyrians will not harm us at all, and the Egyptians are only seeking revenge for an old score." As Sargūn approached, it seemed as if Jezebel were right. The armies did not devastate the land as armies usually do, they behaved in a well-mannered and disciplined way. The only change they brought was to increase the number of pleasure-houses. When Sargūn reached the capital, the king and queen went out to meet them, having prepared their speech. Ahab handed the keys of the palace over to the Assyrian king, saying, "O our saviour, you have come just on time to save us from the invasion of our neighbour in Judah who relies on the backing of Egypt." But Sargūn returned the keys with a smile, saying, "I have no need of your palace or its treasures, and I will leave you undisturbed on your throne. I have only formally annexed your territories, and will leave a governor here with the soldiery. I have heard the same tidings as you have, and there are also

things you do not yet know: the Persians are preparing to force their way through here down to Egypt as soon as they have completed their conquest of Anatolia. I have come to forestall their advance through your land."

Ahab believed he was living a dream, but Jezebel rose to the occasion and quickly said, "Our idol Ba'l has foretold all these events and has called you to come to our aid. We thank you for your kindness and ask you to join us at a banquet in the palace." Jezebel's mind was racing ahead, plotting and scheming and forging ever new intrigues. Could Sargūn not be of use to them in securing the upper hand over troublesome Judah? And perhaps it might even be possible for her to become the wife of this great and powerful man? Perhaps with his help she might even become queen over Egypt? So she thought in her most secret thoughts.

For a whole week there was feasting at the palace, and Jezebel tried every trick she knew to ensnare the great man and make him her servant. After a week had passed, Sargūn's harem-caravan arrived, and therewith the end of Jezebel's hopes and dreams. Sargūn had a harem of over one hundred women, the least of whom was a hundred times more regal and beautiful than she. She was so crestfallen at this that she took to her apartments like a bat with a broken wing and refused to come out. She had one close friend and confidante who spoke to her, saying, "O Jezebel, soon Sargūn will return to Ninive, and then is the time for revenge." "On whom should I avenge myself?" asked the Queen. "Oh, that you know best, my queen," answered the servant. "O yes, I do know. I could poison them all and be done with them, but I still want to live after all!" The servant then recited a verse of poetry:

"Time is like a seed in the soil — and the world is as a stage —
all the players are lined up, waiting to play their parts.
Water the tender shoots in the hearts of men,
and you will attain your aim."

Thereupon Jezebel smiled to herself and said, "You have opened new horizons for me, O trusted one; yes, I will be patient, and when he has left, then I will execute my plan ..."

Six years passed. Sargūn had departed and left behind a governor, while Ahab and Jezebel were still the nominal rulers. People were content, for their lives were not difficult, and they lived in safety within their borders. They did not really care who ruled them, as long as the tax burden was not overly heavy. Obadiah had passed away, and Ilyās ﷺ was all alone. He hid himself in his cave and often saw no sunlight for months, for he was still a hunted man. He would gladly have left the realm, but he was not free to do so. Bitterness waxed in his heart, and he often spoke to himself, "So this is Allah's chosen people? Even now when their women are pregnant with the bastards of unknown fathers they are still proud of their race! When this new generation has grown, there will be no difference between here and Egypt — and there will be no man living to remember the Law of the Lord!" And Ilyās ﷺ wept in silence and solitude and waited for the Lord's Decree.

Ahab would have been content, had he seen as much as a smile from his wife Jezebel. Six years of patience had worn her down. As she saw that she could not achieve her desire, she bent her mind on making mischief. She spread word among the people that the Assyrians were planning to press the men of Israel into their army to use them as cannon-fodder against the Persians, and that all their belongings would be confiscated. People were advised to go into hiding and to store away their goods. When the Assyrians had news of these movements, they began to punish the men they caught severely and many thousands were taken away as slaves. The governor knew very well who was behind this disturbance, and one day he went to the royal couple and spoke to them in pretended ignorance. "You must assist us in quelling this revolt," he said, "on the next holiday you must speak before the assembled folk." He ordered them to speak as he instructed them. So at the next fair King Ahab got up and spoke, "O my people, we have now become part of the great Assyrian Empire; they are our friends and protectors. Why then do you run from them and hide in the hills? We must fight at their side, for their victory will also be our victory, and their defeat our defeat." People felt betrayed by their

king, believing him to have sold out to the Assyrian overlords, and began to hate him. Strife and dissent grew, spying and denunciation took the place of neighbourly conduct, and a man was divided against his brothers.

Hardly anyone remembered the prophet Ilyās ﷺ and he was not seen for a long time. Years passed. The first six years were followed by another six, and another, until seventeen years had passed since Israel came under Assyrian rule. Gradually relations between the Israelites and the Assyrians soured, and the Assyrians began to assert their rights over the conquered people. Little by little they took their property from them and made them into slaves who worked on their own fields under the Assyrian sword. The people groaned under the yoke, but had no strength left to rebel. The king and queen were confined to their palace and were kept as virtual prisoners there. They grew tired of each other's company and had no more to say to each other, so they spent their long hours in silence.

One day the governor came to them and said, "The time has come for me to speak to you openly. We are at war with Persia now, and we are about to withdraw our forces from your territory. In the seventeen years we have known you we have had ample opportunity to observe your baseness of character. At first you appeared to be cooperative and we had no complaint against you, but later on you began to play tricks and we were forced to come down heavy on your people. This they have not forgotten. Now as we leave, we are taking with us many of your men to fight in our armies, and in order for justice to be done, we should not leave you alive. But we have decided to leave you to the mercy of your own people, for we believe they will find much better ways of putting you to death than we could ever devise." With that he left Ahab and Jezebel, and spoke to the assembled priesthood and representatives of the people. He reminded them that all their troubles had been caused by their own king and his wicked queen. The crowds nodded and murmured their assent. Now Ahab and Jezebel feared for their lives for the first time and fled through a secret passageway that Ahab had kept hidden for such a time as this when all hope

failed them. Their intention was to make their way to Jezebel's home-country Sidon and to find assistance there among her relatives.

97 – ILYĀS' ﷺ RETURN TO ZAREPTA AND THE END OF AHAB AND JEZEBEL

AT THE SAME TIME Ilyās ﷺ received a revelation from the Lord, instructing him to go down to Zarepta where he had stayed with the old widow and her son Alyasa' ﷺ many years ago. Ilyās ﷺ had often wondered what had become of them. He doubted that the old woman was still alive, and he hoped that her son had grown up clinging to the path of righteousness which he had shown him when he was only a child. He knew that the kingdom of Judah had also fallen into the darkness of idolatry after the death of Jehoshaphat, and he was anxious.

Ilyās ﷺ reached the town after a month's journey. He went straight to the house which he remembered and knocked, but no one answered him. Another old woman was passing by and stopped to talk to Ilyās ﷺ. He told her he was looking for the old widow and her son who had once lived here. The woman told him that she had died some ten years before, and that her son, Alyasa' ﷺ had grown up to be the most handsome lad in town, and there was not a girl in town who would not have been his sweetheart, but he carried on with none. Instead, he had fled from the city and lived by himself in a straw hut he had made himself, and ploughed his field with his oxen. Both he and his mother had always seemed to be expecting someone who never came, and still Alyasa' ﷺ lived in this expectation. But people would not leave him in peace, in particular the new king's daughters wished for his companionship in their palace, and there would be trouble if he continued to refuse their offers. Tonight was the last night, for they had set a deadline for him to make his decision. "So you had better make haste," said this old woman, "for I feel in my heart that you are the person he has been waiting for."

It was clear that the old woman was also one of the very few believers left in town, and she did all she could to help Ilyās ﷺ. Her son was a captain of the guard so she could pass freely through the city gates, even by night, and she guided Ilyās ﷺ to the field of Alyasa' ﷺ. It was a bright, moonlit night, and Alyasa' ﷺ was not in his hut, but sleeping on a mat outside. Ilyās ﷺ woke him and Alyasa' ﷺ arose and kissed his hand, saying, "I knew all along that you would come one day." Ilyās ﷺ asked him if he was ready to follow him, and Alyasa' ﷺ said, "I am ready this instant." Together they set out without delay until they came to Ilyās' ﷺ cave in Samaria. There Ilyās ﷺ taught Alyasa' ﷺ all that he needed to know.

After the Assyrians left Israel and Ahab and Jezebel had disappeared, there followed a period of confusion and anarchy, as Ahab's son Ahaziah was not strong and decisive enough in his actions. The party of the priests said they would crown Ahaziah king only if he effaced the queen's image from the statue of Ba'l, for they said, "All this misfortune has come upon us because the idol bore her face. A cow is a cow and can only have the face of a cow." But Ahaziah hesitated and dared not do anything until he had definite news of the king's fate. So two years passed in conditions of turbulent unrest, each man taking the law into his own hands.

One day a shepherd came to the priests of the temple and claimed to have discovered the king and queen hiding in a cave. They had made their way to Sidon, in hope of receiving support from Jezebel's relatives, but no one there wanted to know them, or help them escape by sea. So they had gone into hiding, hoping that in time people would forget, if not forgive them. But this was not to be their fate. The town's people went out with the shepherd and found the king and queen at the place he had described. They made them come out of their cave and dragged them both into town where they were put to death by the angry mob. Their bodies were left unburied in the street, and in the night stray dogs came and devoured their flesh and drank their blood. Thus was fulfilled what Ilyās ﷺ had prophesied against Ahab and Jezebel. Ahaziah became king of Israel, but he was

a weak king, and had little understanding of the affairs of state. He spent most of his time in his harem, surrounded by women, seeking comfort in their arms. After two years he died and was succeeded by his brother Yehoram, because Ahaziah had no son. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, had died also, and was buried in Jerusalem, and in his stead reigned his son Yehoram whose wife was Ahab's daughter, the idolatress.

98 – ILYĀS AND ALYASA‘ عليهما السلام

IT WAS IN THE NINETY-FOURTH YEAR after king Sulaymān's عليه السلام death. Ilyās عليه السلام was fifty-nine years of age and Alyasa‘ was twenty-nine. They had left their cave and had taken to wandering in the streets and markets again, as the Lord commanded Ilyās عليه السلام to do, and a small group of believers gathered around them. In Judah, King Yehoram's wife tried to gain influence over her husband, and she said to him, "Look, we are the only kingdom that has no beautiful statues of the gods, and we are a laughing stock for all our neighbours with this invisible god that you worship. Why do you not lift the restrictions your father insisted upon, and leave people free to worship their gods in whatever shape they wish?" Yehoram, her husband, was in doubt, for the memory of events in Israel was still fresh in his mind, and his father's death was recent. But at last he succumbed to his wife's influence, and changed the laws, and many of his people reverted to idolatry. The priests and rabbis were sorrowful at this and prayed to the Lord that He would send Ilyās عليه السلام to Judah. Ilyās عليه السلام also heard of these developments and both he and Alyasa‘ عليه السلام grieved, but the Lord had not ordered him to go to Judah. Shipments arrived from Egypt with carved and graven idols of every shape and texture, and the cults multiplied and spread. Soon Ilyās عليه السلام and Alyasa‘ عليه السلام were alone again, and found no one who would listen to them and their admonitions. Again, hostility against them increased and they were driven back into hiding.

One day Alyasa‘ عليه السلام remarked, "I have a great longing for the sea." Ilyās عليه السلام had been so absorbed in his own dark thoughts that he failed to take the meaning of the words of Alyasa‘. "For the sea?" he answered impatiently, "Then go to the sea! There is one to the west, the Mediterranean; one to the east, the In-

dian Ocean, and one to the south, the Arabian Sea. But know that wherever you choose to travel, there is no sea as vast as the mercy of your Lord. His are endless Mercy Oceans, and peace of heart and mind you will find only with Him. Other seas are troubled by storms and many a man has drowned in its darkness; but the Sea of Faith is never darkened by storm-clouds, nor do their shadows cast any reflection on its surface. It is forever calm and light and pure." Thus spoke Ilyās عليه السلام. Alyasa' عليه السلام regretted his words and explained that he had had a moment of homesickness when he longed for the sea as he had known it in his youth, when he had watched from his window the dolphins playing in the waves. Ilyās عليه السلام then understood him in his heart and comforted him, saying, "Be patient, O Alyasa', Allah Almighty sees and hears all, and He will not leave you in your sadness. Perhaps He will give you a family, and it may be that you will have a son who will share your fondness for the dolphins. It could be that these fish will come to his aid in his hour of greatest need." Ilyās' عليه السلام words were obscure at that time, as is the case with many prophesies and predictions, but in time they too were fulfilled.

After a time Ilyās عليه السلام received a revelation, and he proceeded with Alyasa' عليه السلام into the kingdom of Judah, to restore as many mosques and gather around him as many of the faithful as he could. He came to Jerusalem, and fresh hope was born in his heart. Gladly he would have stayed on to end his days there, and the believers begged him also to stay with them, but before long Ilyās عليه السلام resumed his wanderings. He was ordered to go down to Jericho. This valley was full of sacred memories, of the entry of the Banī Isrā'īl into the Holy Land under their prophet Yūsha'. Ilyās عليه السلام sighed to himself when he thought of the descendants of that chosen people, how they drove their prophets from their gates and made them roam the wilderness. Ilyās عليه السلام was not permitted to enter into the city, nor even to stay for more than a night in any one place, and he was led down towards the River Jordan. He turned to Alyasa' عليه السلام and said, "O my son, you have followed me long enough, and endured more hardship with me than you need have endured. Follow me no

more and go your way." But Alyasa' ﷺ said, "No, my prophet, I will not leave you, unless it be by Divine Command."

99 – DISAPPEARANCE OF ILYĀS ﷺ AND SUCCESSION OF ALYASA' ﷺ

ILYĀS' ﷺ PROPHETIC AWARENESS had informed him that his final day on earth had dawned, and that there were surprises hidden in that last act. And so it was: Ilyās' ﷺ enemies had secretly followed him out of town, and when he and Alyasa' ﷺ had nearly reached the river valley, a voice called out, "Hey, Ilyās, you are surrounded, your luck has run out. Before you is the river which you cannot cross, and we have cut off your retreat! There is no hope of escape, give yourself up!" But Ilyās ﷺ gave them no answer. He turned towards the *qibla* and prayed two *rak'ats* of prayer, then he loosened his belt and shed his cloak. With it he struck the waters of the Jordan and they parted for Ilyās ﷺ and Alyasa' ﷺ to pass through, dry-shod. The unbelievers stood watching and could not believe their eyes. Had not Allah given to Mūsā ﷺ a like miracle, when he parted the Red Sea with his staff to let all the tribes of Israel pass through it, while the hosts of Pharaoh drowned? Little did the unbelievers of this new age recall the stories of old, and they shot their arrows after Ilyās ﷺ. Foiled in their attempt to capture Ilyās ﷺ, they called to the shepherds on the far bank of the river to hold Ilyās ﷺ until they could ford the river.

Ilyās ﷺ and Alyasa' ﷺ hid themselves in the first rocky caves they could find. Ilyās ﷺ had spent more than a lifetime running from the people he was sent to guide, and he had grown old and weary. For the first time now he felt tired of this life, and he wished he would be taken from the face of the earth. But he hoped that it would not be his lot to face death at the hands of his own people and he prayed inwardly and with silent fervour. He would never curse his people, even now, but at the same time he wished not to be saved to continue his life. Thus he prayed, and Allah sees and hears everyone's innermost longing.

At length, the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ appeared to him and said, "Good news to you, Ilyās, the Lord has heard your prayer and has accepted it." Ilyās ﷺ then turned to Alyasa' ﷺ and said to him, "O my son, Alyasa', I am called to return to my Lord; is there anything of mine you wish to be given?" Alyasa' ﷺ answered, "O my prophet and teacher, your soul has always been pure; I wish to be vouchsafed a double portion of your spiritual magnificence." Ilyās ﷺ grew pale and said, "Ask of me something lighter, Alyasa', my son, you have chosen to live with the hardest thing possible. Firstly, you will witness my departure from earth, and secondly, your life will be as full of strife and battle as my own has been. This will have been your choice." Alyasa' ﷺ answered bravely, "Both will be a great honour for me."

They were sheltering in a rocky place, hidden from view. Suddenly a light appeared in the sky, and as it approached, Ilyās ﷺ could make out the shape of a horse of fire. Jibrā'īl ﷺ spoke to Ilyās ﷺ, saying, "Fear not, this fire will descend near you. Mount upon it, and it will carry you away to the Divine Presence where you will assume your appointed station."

A different narration tells it thus: The angel 'Azrā'īl ﷺ appeared to Ilyās ﷺ and he knew that his time had come, and wept bitterly. Then Jibrā'īl ﷺ appeared to him and said, "*Salāms* from the Lord of the Worlds, O Ilyās, why do you shed these bitter tears as you are leaving this passing world to become part of the world eternal?" Ilyās ﷺ replied, "I weep for I perceive in the final vision given to me all the peoples and prophets that are to come after my time, and among them I see the nation of the blessed Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, peace and blessings be upon him. That nation will remain on earth until the end of times, engaged in *dhikru llāh* till the Last Day, while my book will have been folded, and I, resting under the earth, will have no part in this *dhikr* — therefore I weep, feeling deprived." Jibrā'īl ﷺ then said to him, "Your Lord has heard and accepted your prayer, and He has prolonged your life. Mount upon this steed, and you will be taken to your station."

The shape of fire then alighted upon the earth, and where its hooves touched the ground only for the blinking of an eye or

less, the rocks were reduced to ashes. No living creature could have withstood such tremendous heat, but Ilyās ﷺ was completely surrendered to his Lord, and his perfect faith pervaded his heart and all his limbs. Therefore he hesitated not one moment, but turned once more towards Jerusalem, then bade farewell to Alyasa' ﷺ and gave to him his cloak and his belt of leather. This was a sign for Alyasa' ﷺ to be his successor. He then mounted upon the horse of fire, and it bore him away and disappeared into the skies. Ilyās ﷺ was transported into the heavens where he lives on till this very day in the same way as the prophet Idris ﷺ.

Alyasa' ﷺ almost lost his mind watching his prophet and teacher disappear from earth in this fashion, for he could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes. But the Lord strengthened his heart, and Alyasa' ﷺ withstood the impact. He understood then that he had indeed asked for the most difficult thing to bear and prayed for forgiveness. Then the angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ appeared to him and revealed to Alyasa' ﷺ his succession to the prophet Ilyās ﷺ. Alyasa' ﷺ instantly forgot all the hardship he and Ilyās ﷺ had experienced and come through together, for to be honoured by the Lord by being chosen as His holy prophet equals nothing else on earth. Alyasa' ﷺ prostrated in gratitude, then he picked up Ilyās' ﷺ cloak and belt and got ready to meet his persecutors.

They came running up to him and mistook him for Ilyās ﷺ at first, as he was wearing Ilyās' ﷺ garb. They bound him and began questioning him. They realised then that he was not Ilyās ﷺ and pressed him to explain how Ilyās ﷺ had fled. Alyasa' ﷺ told them the truth, but none could believe it. For three days and nights they searched the area and left not a stone unturned, but still they could not believe what Alyasa' ﷺ told them. In the end they gave up and let him go, grumbling only about how they had lost their chance of reward for the head of Ilyās ﷺ. One man among them did have the idea that what he took to be Ilyās' ﷺ powers of magic had been passed on to Alyasa' ﷺ, together with his mantle and sash, but the other men's ears were made deaf against this suspicion and it did not enter their

minds. They disbanded, and Alyasa' ﷺ was left behind, alone, but safe.

The news of Ilyās' ﷺ disappearance soon spread among the people of both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Some people attributed it to magic, others maintained that Ilyās ﷺ had fled across the Jordan; but however they explained it, they were relieved that he had gone and would bother their consciences no more. No one paid any heed to Ilyās' companion Alyasa' ﷺ.

The scattered band of believers rallied around him, as they perceived the signs of the Lord in him and their hopes were revived. Alyasa' ﷺ was sent as prophet to both Israel and Judah, to all the tribes of the Banī Isrā'īl, from the borders of Egypt to the lands of Shām, from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea. Alyasa' ﷺ travelled the whole expanse of this land for many years, accompanied by his servant Gehazi. When he was around fifty years of age, he settled in Samaria, purchased a field and built his house upon it. He married a believing woman who bore him a son. His father named him Yūnus, that is Jonah in Hebrew. Alyasa' ﷺ took the boy down to the sea one day and watched him as he played with the dolphins who were tame and friendly with him. Dolphins are called the "fish of Yūnus" for their friendship with this prophet. Alyasa' ﷺ was given a time fo peace and contentment, living surrounded by his family and a few steadfast believers.

The kings and rulers paid no attention to his activities during this time. They were kept busy enough by skirmishes with the neighbouring kingdoms, or with crushing rebellions within their own borders. Idolatry prevailed and justice fled the land. The rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer, and the more impoverished people became, the more they ran after the idols, instead of turning to the man of God who lived in their midst. Drought and famine, earthquakes and leprosy were the result, for the Wrath of Allah was upon them for their unbelief. Even some among the believers who gathered around Alyasa' ﷺ had secret doubts in their hearts of which they themselves were only half aware, but Alyasa' ﷺ the prophet, perceived them. In order to dispel their doubts he was ordered to per-

form various miracles. Faith does not depend on greater or smaller miracles, but at times the condition of a people may make them necessary. Again Alyasa' ﷺ took up his wandering through the lands so that he could reach many more people, and what he saw on his wanderings did little to encourage him. He found hardly a trace of anything the prophet Mūsā ﷺ had taught of old; the Torah was nearly forgotten, and the kings and great ones were all in the hands of their idolatrous priests and soothsayers. The cruelty and injustice he witnessed throughout exceeded anything he had ever heard of even in the most barbarous lands, and to lead a virtuous life was considered a forbidden act. Those who committed no crime were regarded as suspicious subjects.

100 — ALYASA' — THE HEALING OF NA'MĀN FROM LEPROSY

Because of their sins, Allah Almighty sent the bane of leprosy upon Israel. Both high and low were afflicted by the dreaded disease and when people saw that there was no cure they came to Alyasa' ﷺ and begged him to heal them. Allah Almighty gave him this miracle power, and people were healed by his hands. So the fame of Alyasa' ﷺ spread along with the disease.

Illness knows no borders, and in time leprosy began to appear also in the kingdom of Syria. No one paid much attention to it as long as only the poor and powerless were affected, but when one day Na'mān, Syrian king's commander-in-chief was afflicted, the disease was taken more seriously. This general was the king's right-hand man; he had been victorious in every battle, while all battles fought without him had ended in defeat. The afflicted general was bedded in the king's palace, and all the king's physicians and medicine men were called in to apply their healing arts, but to no avail. The king suffered almost more than his general, being unable to help him. What was to be done?

One evening they had laid the sick man in the green shade of the gardens when the women of the palace came out to pick flowers. Among them was a young girl, an Israelite who had been taken prisoner, and she strayed unnoticed near to where the general lay and began to sing a little song to herself, for she thought she was alone. The general Na'mān however heard her song, and it had a strange effect on him: it was as if he sensed a mysterious power in it and an unexpected new hopefulness took hold of him. He called to the girl to repeat her song to him, and then he asked her many questions concerning herself and her people. The girl confessed that she had heard her mother sing this song to a sick woman who had then recovered. She told him also of the prophet and wise-man Alyasa' عليه السلام who lived in Israel and who knew how to cure the disease of leprosy: many times she had seen it with her own eyes. She said he was a man who lived and worked only for his Lord's good pleasure and who accepted no other reward. Na'mān was touched by her words even more than by her song, and he determined to go and seek out this healer whose faith overcame such great trials. All night long he thought about this possibility, and when the king came to visit him the next day he told him about it. The king answered, "Go, do not delay, perhaps there is truth in this, I will give you a letter of accompaniment addressed to Yoash, king of Israel. Surely he will be willing to grant me this favour, if only to forestall another war." The letter was written and sent ahead of Na'mān by messenger. When Yoash, king of Israel had read the letter, he flew into a rage and yelled, "What is this? The king of Syria is sending me his leprous commander, expecting me to find a cure for him! Everyone knows that leprosy is incurable! He is in reality only looking for an excuse to wage a new war against us: if his general is not cured, he will say it is our fault, and launch a new attack!"

The next day Na'mān arrived in Samaria and was received by the king. He said to him that there was no known cure for this disease and that he could do nothing for him. Na'mān had expected no other reply and said, "If you give me leave, I will go look after my own cure in your lands." The king of Israel

did not object, and Na'mān went out to find the holy man he had heard sung about. Before long, he was directed into the presence of Alyasa' عليه السلام, and asked him for help. Alyasa' عليه السلام said to him, "Go to the

River Jordan and immerse yourself in its waters seven times, praising the Name of Almighty Allah each time, and by the Mercy of Allah, you will be cleansed of your disease as well as of your unbelief, if it be Allah's Will." Na'mān withdrew, but he was malcontent. "I have not come all this way only to bathe in a river," he grumbled, "in my country there are plenty of healing springs and rushing streams — what is so special about the waters of the Jordan River?"

A believer who happened to be nearby heard his words, and said to him, "You may have good waters in your country too, but you have been directed by the words of a prophet who is guided by divine inspiration. Do not become the victim of your own false pride; you lose nothing by trying out this remedy, and if his words are true, you have everything to gain." Na'mān was softened by these words, and he went and washed seven times in the waters of the Jordan. When he emerged the last time he was healed. He had never felt so good in all his life, for faith had been born in his heart. He returned to the prophet, and said, "I have come to you a different man than I was yesterday, and I believe in the Almighty Creator of heavens and the earth who has sent you as a prophet to guide men. My place now is no longer among the idolaters of Shām, I wish to spend the remainder of my days in the holy city of Jerusalem. I have come to you to ask you what you will have as a reward for all you have done for me? All that I own is at your command." Alyasa' عليه السلام said to him, "Go in peace and give praise to the Lord. My reward is with Him, and I may take nothing from you, for I serve Him alone."

So Na'mān departed a believer and after kissing the prophet's hand he took the road towards Jerusalem. But Gehazi, the servant of Alyasa', was not inured to the greed of his lower soul which was whispering within him, "After all, this general is a rich man, and we are very poor; why should we not profit a little from the good deeds Alyasa' عليه السلام is performing?" So he ran

after the general and said to him, "My Lord, the prophet has sent me after you, for just now two guests have arrived, and he would ask you for a little gift, so that he can make them welcome." The general was only too glad to be able to give, and sent Gehazi back with twice the amount he had asked for. When he returned to Alyasa', عليه السلام the prophet regarded him sadly and said, "What have you done, O Gehazi? You have succumbed to the temptation of greed; therefore the leprosy of Na'mān has passed to you, I fear. Your days with me, alas, are over." So Gehazi was cast out, a leper.

101 — ALYASA' عليه السلام VICTORIOUS

ALYASA' عليه السلام CONTINUED his life of wandering and preaching among the tribes of Israel and Judah, and he performed many miracles. Many hearts turned towards him, and the number of believers increased. During the years that followed there were again many wars with the surrounding kingdoms, and many a Muslim fell in battle or was led off into slavery. The people came to Alyasa' عليه السلام and complained to him, saying, "Why do we suffer the same fate as the unbelievers? Why are we made to share in their punishment?" Alyasa' عليه السلام promised to intercede with the Lord. He prayed and the Lord answered him. From that time on, the angel would inform Alyasa' عليه السلام every time the enemy was planning an attack and Alyasa' عليه السلام sent warning to the people of those villages. In this way, people could take precautions and the enemy's raids were foiled. The Syrian king grew angry at their failures, and losing patience he cried, "So! There are spies even in my bedroom!" But his commanding officer answered him, "No, not so, my king. Scouts have come back from the lands of Samaria, and they tell us that there lives a man named Alyasa' عليه السلام who foretells all that is going to happen, before you have even given your generals the order." The Syrian king grew pale, for he remembered that name in connection with his general Na'mān who had been healed by the prophet and had left his service. He decided to halt the raids

for a while and to gather strength for an all-out war that would bring them a decisive victory.

Some years passed. Idol worship still continued in the lands of Israel, in spite of the best efforts of Alyasa' to uproot it. One day the king of Moab prepared to revolt against his overlords, and Israel, Judah and Edom united against him. Moab lay to the east of the Dead Sea. The allies planned to surround the Moabites from all sides before their army could come out to meet them in open battle. In order to do that, their own armies had to cross a great and waterless desert, and it was at the height of the summer when not a drop of rain could be expected to fall. After some days they ran short of water and before long both men and beasts were succumbing to the extreme heat, dying of thirst. The men began to grumble against their leaders, saying, "Do they intend to lead us around in the desert for forty years as Mūsā did to his people?" The kings worried that mutiny might break out from within the ranks, but they were powerless, and the huge army, from want of water, could move neither forward nor retreat. They set to offering sacrifices to the statues of idols they had carried with them, but they saw no change.

Alyasa' عليه السلام the prophet accompanied the army, for there were Muslims among the soldiers who had been forced to conscription. His heart was heavy as he contemplated his people; once, he thought, they gone to battle carrying with them the Holy Ark, now the holy temple had been made into a sculpture gallery, and the army carried with them these foul idols. But from the compassion that accompanies wisdom Alyasa' عليه السلام implored his Lord for help, and he received a revelation. He stepped up in front of the kings and spoke to them, "O you who are descended from the prophets Ibrāhīm, Ya'qūb and Yūsuf! How long until you see that your worship of bits of stone and wood will lead you nowhere? How long will you refuse to listen to the only voice that might be able to help you out of this calamity?" The kings looked at the speaker and did not know him. "I am Alyasa', the companion and servant of Ilyās عليه السلام whom you persecuted until he disappeared from this earth.

You may have forgotten about me, but I have not forgotten about you, for it was my mission to accompany this army." The kings had so little hope that they forgot even to be angered against Alyasa' ﷺ. "Help us then, if you can, O man of Allah," they said. "What can I do when all these five-hundred priests and their idols can do nothing for you? You pray to them for salvation, but you know well that they are but lifeless, senseless objects without power to help or to harm. Not so the Living God, the God of our fathers and forefathers, Allah Almighty, who continually shows Mercy to His Creation. If you were not gone so far astray, Allah would never have led you into this difficulty, and the Moabites would not have risen against your rule of oppression. If you persist in your crooked way, there is no telling what may befall you yet ..."

The kings heard only the promise of immediate relief and grew impatient with the prophet's preaching. "Help us now; we can discuss everything else when we have returned to our palaces." But Alyasa' ﷺ said, "You seem to forget that I am not the first prophet you will betray and deny and accuse of performing magic tricks. When you return to comfort all will be forgotten and you would continue as before. But you deceive only yourselves, for Allah sees and hears, and He forgets not." Then he gave them the advice he was inspired to give, "Order your men to dig trenches, for you will witness a miracle. You can see that there is not a single cloud in the sky, and you know there is no water in this ground. By the power of the Almighty Lord you will see these trenches fill up with water that was not there before, and it will happen before your eyes and all the army and the beasts will be saved."

Doubtful though they were, the kings gave the order, and the exhausted men dug trenches in a final desperate effort, while Alyasa' ﷺ climbed atop a hill and prayed to Allah. The Lord heard his prayer and as everyone looked on, the wells miraculously filled up. Great was the rejoicing of man and beast, and all drank their fill and rested. Alyasa' ﷺ then advised the kings not to advance any further but to hide in ambush. The Moabites had heard of the advance of the united armies, and

they made ready for war. They came to the valley where the Israelites had camped and beheld the trenches. However, they appeared to them to be filled with blood. The Moabites knew their own country, so they knew there was no water in that valley. Their commanders discussed the situation and concluded that the armies of the three kings must have fallen upon one another and that the trenches contained the blood of the slain. So they believed the enemy force to be greatly weakened, charged ahead into the valley and straight into the trap. They found themselves surrounded from all sides, and were quickly routed. Even their king was slain, and the few who escaped were pursued far into their own land. The victorious armies then fell upon Moab, forgetting the prophet's warnings, and burnt and pillaged the land, inflicting all the cruelties a marauding army can inflict upon a land. How quickly they forgot that they had nearly perished from thirst only two days before, had they not been rescued by a miracle! But no mercy or compassion stirred within their hearts as they despoiled the land of Moab, leaving not a blade of grass standing, nor any stone unturned.

102 — YŪNUS ﷺ, THE SON OF ALYASA' ﷺ

LYASA' ﷺ NOW was growing old; he approached his eightieth year and it was the thirty-seventh year of his prophethood after the disappearance of Ilyās ﷺ. He had not endured as much hardship as Ilyās ﷺ had, but just as Ilyās ﷺ, he suffered from seeing his efforts remain fruitless. Idol worshippers were still numerous and the land was in constant turmoil and threatened at its borders. Israel and Judah were paying high tribute to the Assyrian king. People groaned under the yoke but still cherished their idols. Alyasa' ﷺ had taught a great many and trained many men in the knowledge of the Law. His family had grown large, but of all his sons he loved Yūnus ﷺ most.

One fine spring day Alyasa' ﷺ sat down at the foot of a blossoming tree, deep in thought. His son Yūnus ﷺ was then thirty-three years old. Yūnus ﷺ came up to his father and asked for his permission to travel. Alyasa' ﷺ granted him permission to go and busy himself with trade and commerce and to travel the ways of the merchants. Yūnus ﷺ was glad, at the same time he was loth to part from his aged father, unsure of whether they would ever meet again. But Alyasa' ﷺ insisted that he go and find his own way. Yūnus ﷺ then said, "I will go and find a place by the sea, similar to your hometown. Then I will have you come and you will sit on the balcony of my house and throw bread to the fish, playing with the dolphins as we used to do long ago." "Never mind about the fish and the sea, my son, I am facing other seas and knowing other pleasures now," answered his father. "Upon a great river, before it flows into the sea, there lies the city of Basra, and not far from there is the great capital of the Assyrians, Ninive. There it was that our father Ibrāhīm ﷺ destroyed the chief idol with his axe, and to there you must now wend your way. Perhaps you will find what

you are looking for, my beloved son." Yūnus ﷺ could scarcely contain his excitement, and had he not been as humble and respectful of character as he was, he would have cried out, "I am off to my destination, father!", but as it was, he said modestly, "I cannot hope to fill the footsteps of Ibrāhīm ﷺ, but I hope to attain at least the honour of his axe!" His father Alyasa' ﷺ, however, beheld a vision of future events, and he said to his son, "How is it that you would choose one and reject another of the gifts that Allah has destined for you?" Yūnus ﷺ replied, "O my father, I would not dare to ask of Allah to bestow upon me the honour of prophethood ..."

103 – THE DEATH OF ALYASA' ﷺ

THE NEXT MORNING Yūnus ﷺ took leave of his father, but in spite of his eagerness to be on his way, there was something troubling him in the back of his mind which eluded his grasp as much as he tried to think about it. He was gone on his trading mission for six months when he found a messenger to take a message home to his father. He told him that all was well with him and that he was on his way home. The heart of Alyasa' ﷺ was gladdened when the received news from his son. But soon after that he fell ill, and he knew it was to be his final illness, for he had felt the call of his Lord. His people and close of kin saw his condition deteriorating and there was nothing they could do for him. Realising that he would leave them soon, they began to weep and mourn, as if he had already died. "If only his son Yūnus ﷺ would return in time," they said to one another. Alyasa' ﷺ picked up their whisperings and addressed them, "It is not important that he return before I pass away for we have already said farewell to each other, and the matter rests with Allah." Then he called together the whole congregation of believers and led them in prayer. When the prayer was completed Alyasa' ﷺ spoke to them his final words. "O my brethren," he said, "band together and do not disperse, and never lose hope in your Lord. Since the world began, how many prophets has

the Lord not sent to mankind — and where are they now? No matter how corrupt the people of this land may become, do promise me one thing: that you will adhere to the teachings of the prophets sent to the Banī Isrā'īl, and not go astray. Mankind was born of a single father and mother, and it is not race which confers excellence; devotion to the Will of the Creator is what distinguishes and enables men. What would the night skies be without stars to decorate them? That is the likeness of the believers: even if they be very few, their light will brighten the darkness of spiritual night."

Alyasa' عليه السلام took their solemn pledge in silence, regarding each man in his turn. Once more he spoke and asked the assembly, "Who of you will swear by his life that he will continue steadfast in his worship when I am gone?" None dared to give an answer and they all hung their heads, for no one could be so sure of himself, and the term denoting worship was so very comprehensive: all the commands and prohibitions, and how easily might a man not transgress in heedlessness! But into the disconcerted silence one strong voice spoke out, and it was Dhu l-Kifl, the kinsman of Alyasa', who said, "I will swear not to neglect my religious obligations ever, and to this I pledge my word." The assembly was relieved that one man had taken the burden of this oath upon himself, thus vindicating them all.

After this last gathering, Alyasa' عليه السلام lay down and surrendered his soul, having bidden his dear wife, Yūnus عليه السلام mother, farewell. He passed away in the afternoon and was buried before the evening prayer, in a simple grave without pomp or ceremony. How great a contrast to the death of a mighty one or a ruler of the cities! For days whole populations are engaged in banquets and speech-making in honour of the deceased who is laid to rest in a splendid sepulchre amidst all manner of luxury that he can no longer enjoy. Here none less than a prophet of Allah had passed away, one of the truly noble and elect, and only a small gathering of believers followed in his funeral procession.

That same night there was a death in a neighbouring village. People were in a hurry to bury the man, but they were too lazy

to dig a fresh pit. Seeing that there was a recent grave nearby, they opened up the topsoil, and tipped the body into it, right on top of the body of the prophet Alyasa' ﷺ! In the morning, however, they found the corpse tossed out of the grave on the open ground. Instead of admitting that the power of a prophet continues even into the grave, they tried to explain away the happening. "A mountain lion must have dug him up," they conjectured, or, "He was not really dead and climbed out of the grave, only to die later." Unwilling to accept the miracle, they missed another opportunity to repent, and Allah sees and hears all that they do.

May Allah send peace upon the blessed soul of Alyasa' ﷺ.

104 – YŪNUS' ﷺ YEARS OF TRAVEL

YŪNUS ﷺ HAD LEFT on his trading mission half a year before the death of Alyasa' ﷺ, his camels laden with dried figs and raisins which were the specialties of his country, and with his father's blessing. Alyasa' ﷺ was given farsightedness into the future, and his wisdom told him that there were other reasons for Yūnus's ﷺ travelling besides trade. Yūnus ﷺ soon joined up with an Assyrian caravan and travelled with them. For days he felt very lonely because no one spoke his language, but at last he met a Hebrew with whom he could speak. This man told him that the road was made unsafe by brigands and highwaymen, who robbed and murdered travellers mercilessly. Those whom they did not kill, he said, they made into slaves and led off to be sold or ransomed. Even the wounded who might have escaped the raid had no chance, for the soldiery was in alliance with the robbers in that border region, sharing their profits and condoning their activities. They would round up the wounded and fugitives, and arrest them for having attacked the caravan.

Soon the caravan reached a market-town and after trading there successfully they camped some way out near the open road. The Assyrians unpacked their travelling gods from their

saddlebags, and made obeisance to them. After that they embarked on a drinking bout, joyful of their success in trading and heedless of the dangers of the road, and soon their revelry became so uninhibited and shameless that Yūnus ﷺ could not endure their company. He and his friend, the Hebrew, led their camels away to a nearby shelter so as not to witness the abasement of their comrades. As they lay sleepless that night, the drunken men were attacked by a band of robbers and overpowered before even one of them could reach for his sword. Whoever was not killed was led off in chains, and all their goods and camels fell into the hands of the robbers. Yūnus's ﷺ friend who knew their ways counselled Yūnus ﷺ to make no sound, and when the robbers had gone they set out instantly and left the area. They travelled together for a while, and Yūnus ﷺ taught the man and instructed him in the religion of the prophets, until they came to the parting of ways. The friend departed, warning Yūnus ﷺ to be on his guard: he had so far witnessed only one kind of robbery, and he was new to the road. "There is still much for you to learn," he said, "for the world is a corrupt place and your heart is yet pure. Not all the robbery you encounter will be so blatant, not all dishonesty so easy to detect," he said and went on his way.

By and by Yūnus ﷺ came to the banks of the Euphrates, and there he saw a great crowd of people waiting to cross the river. They were being ferried across in all kinds of vessels, boats, rafts, inflated skins. Yūnus ﷺ was told that if he wished to cross with his camel he would have to wait in line for two days. As Yūnus ﷺ prepared himself for a lengthy wait, he was approached by a fellow who said to him, "Why wait here for two whole days? I can tell you of a better way: I will buy your goods and your camel from you. You leave everything with me on this side, and on the other side of the river you will be met by my agent who will give you a camel and merchandise of equal value in return." Yūnus ﷺ, in the purity of his spirit conceived of no evil and agreed to this plan, and gave his goods and camel into the man's charge. Then he boarded the ferry carrying only his essential luggage with him and crossed the great river. He disembarked

on the far side and looked around for the man who was to meet him with a fresh camel and goods, but in the great throng of people he lost track of anybody he knew and could find no one who spoke his language. So he sat down by the banks of the river and waited trustingly to be contacted. After some hours the ferryman noticed him and asked him about himself. Yūnus ﷺ told them his story, and the ferrymen laughed in his face, telling him that he had been made a fool of, and this was a well-known bit of trickery; they all wondered at his innocence. Yūnus ﷺ thought of returning to the river's other bank, but the ferrymen assured him that he had no hope of finding his possessions, for the rogues would have taken off long ago.

105 – YŪNUS ﷺ, A POTTER IN NINIVE

YŪNUS ﷺ WAS APPALLED at this set-back of his fortunes, as he realized that he had only himself to blame, for had he waited in line patiently, all would have gone smoothly. The Assyrians ruled the land strictly but with justice. So what could poor Yūnus ﷺ do? Luckily he still had some of his money which he carried on his person, and he soon found a caravan that was willing to take him along, provided he paid them for a rented camel and their services. So Yūnus ﷺ gave them what money he had and travelled with them for seven days. They traversed a desert and were approaching the capital Ninive when they came to a place that was inhabited almost exclusively by potters and tile-makers. Yūnus ﷺ met a man who took him to see his grandfather who was a master potter and the most skilled of them all. But he had grown old and needed a helper and apprentice. Yūnus ﷺ offered to stay with him and to learn the trade, and the old potter was very glad to have him. His grandson was travelling back to Sidon, and as Yūnus ﷺ knew that his way would lead him through Samaria, he gave him a letter to deliver to his father which he faithfully did. Yūnus ﷺ stayed with the potter and admired his skill and the unusual glazes he knew how to make.

One day a messenger arrived from the court at Nivive, commissioning a piece of pottery which was to be a complete novelty, intended to impress the ambassador of a neighbouring kingdom. It was to be a true work of art. The old man sat down to think of something the likes of which had never been seen in the land. Yūnus ﷺ came to his side and said, "My uncle was a potter, and I used to help him a little in his workshop. Once, I remember, we made a jug, in such a way that when you poured out water from it to wash your guests' hands the song of birds would be heard over the gushing of the water, as if a nightingale were singing near a waterfall. Perhaps that would please the king and his guests, too." The old potter was delighted by this novel idea and at once they began to fashion this marvelous jug. They had just completed it when the potter's grandson returned from Sidon bringing the sad news of the death of Al-yasa' ﷺ. Yūnus ﷺ grieved for his father, and it seemed to him now that his heavy heart at his departure had been a foreboding that they were not to meet again in this life.

The jug was finished and there were two days until it was to be delivered when the old potter took to his bed and knew that he would not rise again. He said to Yūnus ﷺ, "Here, my son, for this you have come to me: take my money, buy a horse and cart and bring this jug to the king, for I will not be able to go myself, I am expected at the court of another King." Yūnus ﷺ did as he was bidden, and when he had bought the horse and cart he bedded the old potter on a bed of straw, loaded on the presents for the king, and drove off towards the city.

Arriving in the capital, the old potter directed Yūnus ﷺ towards the house of one of his sons who lived there. But when this son saw that his father was ill and needed care and perhaps medical attention, he wanted nothing to do with him and would have turned him away. Yūnus ﷺ, though inwardly enraged at this lack of filial piety, spoke to him calmly and in measured words. "Your father is the potter of the king," he said, "and he is an important man on an important mission. Should anything happen to him, I should not like to be held responsible, and neither should you. He is carrying valuable goods and is expected

at court, so you would be well advised to look after him, lest the blame fall on you." The son for all his callousness understood this language, and he certainly feared the punishment of the king. He sent word to the king, and shortly a whole troop of doctors and medicine men arrived, frantic to effect a cure, for they were sent under threat of severe punishment if they should fail. But the old potter said, "Nobody can do anything for me, for my time is almost over. Let it be known to the king that they have done for me all they could and their care has been of the best, and let none be punished for my sake. I leave my kiln and workshop to this youth Yūnus ﷺ, for he is more advanced in the craft of pottery than my son, indeed he knows more of it than I do myself. It is he who fashioned the jug for the guest of our king, and may he receive due credit." The old man smiled at Yūnus ﷺ then he turned his face to the wall and passed away. It was his will that he be buried in his pottery which he had left, together with all his belongings to his apprentice Yūnus ﷺ who in a short time had won his heart. But the old man's son was a greedy and irreverent fellow, and he contested his father's will, saying, "We are his own flesh and blood, and have had to work for him for many, many years; now all his estate is to go to this upstart who arrived on his doorstep only a few months ago? That is unjust and I do protest!" Yūnus ﷺ remained aloof and picked no quarrel with the man, but agreed to turn over everything to the old man's son, as soon as he had returned from delivering the pot at court.

Meanwhile the king's footmen had arrived to fetch the potter, and Yūnus ﷺ went with them to the palace. They had witnessed the scene at the deathbed and were impressed by Yūnus ﷺ show of character. They led Yūnus ﷺ through the streets of Ninive, and never before had he beheld such a city: every building he saw was a work of art; every street corner was adorned with painted statues; there were turrets and balconies and marvelous shapes hewn out of stone, every nook was embellished in some way. Gazing at all these wonders, Yūnus ﷺ head began to swim. One thing in particular Yūnus ﷺ remarked on his walk through the city: all the soldiers and armed guards, police-

and watchmen bore on their shoulder a kind of axe, either as a weapon, or as a ritual emblem. When they came to the palace, he saw that all the men on duty there, doorkeepers, gardeners and kitchen slaves, too, carried a version of this same axe. Yūnus ﷺ thought to himself, "How strange it is that they all carry an axe; could it be the legacy of Ibrāhīm ﷺ the prophet, who destroyed the main idol of Nimrūd with an axe, that they all carry one now in his honour?"

He was led into the palace and down innumerable corridors until he came to a waiting room. Guards lined all four walls of the room, and Yūnus ﷺ could not tell whether they were men or statues, they stood so stiffly erect, absolutely motionless, and their silence was complete. Later he learned that they were men, but they could neither hear nor speak, and thus they mirrored the world of silence in which they lived. They were selected for this duty as children, and had their eardrums pierced; therefore, they were unable to betray the secrets of the royal palace, for a deaf man does not learn to speak intelligibly. They, too, carried a short-handled axe over their shoulder.

At last Yūnus ﷺ was admitted to the presence of the king who received him graciously. Yūnus ﷺ handed him the clay pot and explained its particularity, and the king was pleased beyond measure. Everything hitherto made in that country had been of awesome and terrible shape, frightening to the beholder, and intended to enhance the atmosphere of fearsome majesty surrounding the king. But the new object Yūnus ﷺ had made was of a graceful and pleasing shape, and truly a novelty. The king asked Yūnus ﷺ about himself and his country, and having already heard from his courtiers what had transpired at the home of the old potter's son, he suggested to Yūnus ﷺ that he settle in Ninive and fill the vacancy the old man had left: he was to become the king's own potter. Yūnus ﷺ accepted gladly, and in addition to his promised reward he was given a nice house and workshop near the palace, equipped with everything he needed to practise his art.

Yūnus ﷺ settled and lived in Ninive for three years. He got to know the city well, and learned the Assyrian language. But he

never spoke of religious matters to anyone, discussing neither his own religion nor that of anyone else. On the outskirts of the city there was a high, treeless hill which they called their prayer mount. There was space enough to accommodate a congregation of many thousands there. This great sanctuary was used for celebrations on the highest holidays in the year, when observances at the various separate temples in the town might have aroused the jealousy and anger of certain gods against others: in going to one central location they sought to avoid this danger; so it was explained to Yūnus ﷺ.

One day an officer came to Yūnus's ﷺ house informing him that the king was preparing to travel to Sidon and wished him to accompany him. He was to meet the royal equipage the very next morning, at the foot of the great "prayer mount", just at daybreak. Yūnus ﷺ was obliged to obedience and promised to come, but in his heart he wondered what the king could want of him, of what service he could be to him on such a journey. Early the next morning he went to the appointed place and waited. He waited and waited till it was nearly noon, and still no one had come. At long last the officer who had been to see him the day before arrived, and said he had orders now to take Yūnus ﷺ to the king. Yūnus ﷺ followed the man to the palace, and when he stood before the great lord of Ninive, he found him smiling at him benevolently. He said to Yūnus ﷺ, "My dear friend, you are wondering what this all may mean; now I shall explain it to you. You have just passed a great test and have proven yourself worthy of my trust and confidence. You see, you are a foreigner in this land, and when you arrived no one knew you, your origins or intentions. All you had to recommend you was your art and your good character. Now I have always been convinced of your loyalty and worth, but there are many of my subjects and courtiers who are suspicious of foreigners, indeed, whose job it is to be suspicious, and to detect spies among our ranks and agents of foreign powers who wish to undermine our rule and diminish our power. Therefore, I have been forced to place you under surveillance for a long time, though you had no knowledge of this. Yesterday I admin-

istered the final test, when I asked you to be ready to travel at a moment's notice, with no explanation: your instant obedience left no room for any doubt. Therefore, I am pleased to tell you that I am raising your rank and granting you my friendship. As a token of this I will let you see what I am doing to your enemies, for your sake." With that he gave to his servants a certain sign, and they led Yūnus ﷺ from the throne-room down many corridors, until they came to a hall from which many doors led off into different tracts of the palace. All these doors bore signs; on one was written, "Door of Goodness," on another "Door of Safety", or "Door of Women" and so on, until they came to a door on which was written "Door of Torment". Clearly, this was the entrance to the royal torture chambers. Yūnus ﷺ now understood the king's thoughts, and he said to the attendants, "It gives me no pleasure to watch anyone being tortured, on the contrary, it hurts me as much as the unfortunate one and it grieves my soul. For it is not the custom among my people and I do not approve of such things. In any case, I wish for no one to be hurt on my account. Please inform the king of this my wish and ask him to let the prisoners go." Then Yūnus ﷺ returned to his house and continued his life as before.

106 — YŪNUS ﷺ LEAVES NINIVE AND RECEIVES ALLAH'S CALL

SOME TIME LATER a man from 'Aqaba came to Ninive and chanced to meet Yūnus ﷺ. Finding him a countryman and congenial, he spoke with him for a while of many things concerning their homeland. At last the man from 'Aqaba said to Yūnus ﷺ, "What are you doing here in this place among these godless strangers? Do we not have a blessed country of our own, which we call the Promised Land, and are we not favoured by the Almighty above all other people? Have we not received holy scripture through the hands of the prophets, and are the ways of our religion not excellent in all respects? What then are you doing, wasting your time here among the gentiles, and serving this heathen king?" Yūnus ﷺ answered him, "My

position is not bad at all, I am the head of royal potters in this kingdom, and the king is my friend." "So, you have become a slave of silver and gold and have forgotten that you have a son's duty to perform towards your aged and widowed mother."

After talking to the man from 'Aqaba for a while, Yūnus ﷺ began to feel quite restless and homesick, and he agreed to travel back with him to his home country. But this he could not do without the permission of the king of Ninive, and the man from 'Aqaba could not postpone his journey for a single day. Hurriedly Yūnus ﷺ sent word to the king, asking to grant him leave to visit his home. The king understood this human longing, but he wished not to lose such an excellent craftsman as Yūnus ﷺ was, so he told Yūnus ﷺ he was free to go if he left someone equally skillful behind to take his place. Now, luckily, Yūnus ﷺ had been training an apprentice for years, and now he brought him before the king and introduced him. The king was satisfied when he was shown the artefacts made by the apprentice, and Yūnus ﷺ was free to depart. The king, being fond of Yūnus ﷺ was sad to see him go, and invited him to return to his kingdom at any time he wished to. Yūnus ﷺ bade him farewell and was off.

The travellers had a camel each, and after a day's journey or so they came to a certain village. Yūnus's companion and the caravan they were travelling with wished to spend the night there and rest and replenish their provisions. As they approached the first house, Yūnus ﷺ saw a bier being carried from the house. They stood still to let the procession pass, and they saw then that it was joined by many more such biers, moving in a long line towards the cemetery of the village. He said to his companions, "Obviously there is a contagious plague in this village, we must skirt it and avoid contact, let us pass on right now." But the caravan did not want to hear of a detour. "We have passed through this village plenty of times before, and nothing ever happened to us; why should the plague touch us just now?" And many such careless words they spoke. Yūnus ﷺ explained that he had been taught not to enter a country when there is a plague, nor to run from it if one happens to be

living there at the time, but no one listened to him. In the end, Yūnus ﷺ went off by himself and camped at a distance alone on a hill from where he could oversee the village and its roads of access. He told his companions that he would wait for them there. Meanwhile the caravan went off into the village, to fill up their water-bags and replenish their supplies. When Yūnus ﷺ awoke the next morning and peered over to his friends' camp-site, he could detect not a stir, while again there was a long funeral procession moving towards the graveyard. Yūnus ﷺ remained at his post and watched, and from time to time it seemed to him as if he saw someone raise his head slightly from the ground, but for all the six days that he watched, not a soul rose up and moved from the camp. After a week there was also no more movement of funeral processions in the village, and Yūnus ﷺ understood that the plague had ravaged man and mouse. Sadly he saddled his camel and prepared to be on his way. As he plodded along despondently, he met a band of Assyrian soldiers going towards the ill-fated village and he warned them not to go there, on account of the plague that had taken all the lives there. They thanked him for his advice, and considered his warning them a great kindness, and responded in kind by showing him the way through the uninhabited region he had to pass, without guide or companions. Yūnus ﷺ bade them salute their king, and they parted company.

Yūnus's ﷺ road continued on through a mountainous region. He spent the night there, and as he was resting after his morning devotions, his father appeared to him in a dream. He saw him as he had never seen him in real life, in an angry mood. He was yelling at his son, "What do you think you are doing? Why do you think I sent you there, do you think it was without wisdom, just to please your whim? You were sent there for a purpose and for a divine intention. Why can you not just stay there and wait, you impatient youngster? Through your impatience you will lose everything, go back this instant and do as I say!"

Yūnus ﷺ awoke, appalled, and immediately turned on his heels to retrace his steps. As he was going along the road, pon-

dering on the furious apparition, and still shaking in his boots, he suddenly beheld a light in the sky that appeared to descend from on high, and come steadily towards him. It grew and grew, and as it came closer, Yūnus ﷺ saw it take human shape. At last it came down to the ground right beside him and he heard a voice coming from that shape which said, „*As-salāmu 'alaykum, yā* Yūnus! You need not fear me, I am the angel Jibrā'īl, and I am sent by the Lord to reveal to you that you have been chosen to be His prophet. He is sending you back to Ninive, there to perform your mission!"

Yūnus ﷺ felt overwhelmed, prayed and thanked the Lord and asked to be granted the strength to perform his task well. He turned to retrace his footsteps and by midday he stopped by the banks of a river, and sat to take his rest. Suddenly, on the opposite bank, a man appeared from out of the bushes, and as he raised his arm to cast his net into the waters, he called out to the fishes, "Come, O ye little fish, come to me, into my net; I am your friend, and you know I will take not a fish more than I absolutely need for my livelihood." With that he cast his net, and it filled up with fish in no time, the fish swimming into it by choice it seemed. The man kept his word and took only two fish from the net, and returned the others to the waters. Yūnus ﷺ wondered at this, and was about to call to the strange man, but this one had already seen him, and motioned for him to come over and share his meal with him, for he had kept two fish that day instead of only one, and he asked Yūnus ﷺ be his guest. Yūnus ﷺ crossed the river and sat with the man and learned his story: he was from a nearby village and had been engaged to a cousin of his, the daughter of the old aunt who had raised him. One day he had gone to town and when he returned he had found the village burnt and despoiled, with most of the populace led off into bondage. His fiancée was gone, only his old aunt lived to tell the tale before she, too, died. Disappointed with his fortunes and life in general, the young man had turned to the wilderness and had lived there by himself ever since, with only the wild beasts for company. Fifty years had passed to the day when Yūnus ﷺ met him. Yūnus ﷺ then began to speak to

him and tried to tell him of his prophethood and the message he was to deliver, but the man said, "This is the third time in my long life that someone has tried to convert me to the truth of this religion, but I am afraid you will not be able to conquer my doubts. Waste not your breath, but do consent to be my guest tonight, if you please; come, I will show you to my home."

He led Yūnus ﷺ along until they came to a cave. A stream of bright, clear water ran right through it. The man said, "Your eyes are not accustomed to the total darkness of the night; I will show you how I have light in this cave." He showed Yūnus ﷺ a spot in the cave, where black pitch dripped steadily onto the stone. The man told him that he had learnt to collect the black stuff and to mix it with sand; then at night he would light it and his torch gave him sufficient light and good cheer. As the two men sat talking that evening, they began to wonder whether the cave had been inhabited by other men before his time, and Yūnus ﷺ asked the man whether he had found any trace, bones or weapons or pots? No, said the man, he had found no bones or the like, only a single hair he had found in the cave, and he went to fetch it to show it to Yūnus ﷺ. As he unwrapped the object, Yūnus ﷺ perceived a most delicious fragrance rising from it, and when he saw it, he recognized it for the delicate hair of a small child. Yūnus ﷺ wondered at this single hair, and suddenly his mind cleared and he saw with the vision of truth: this hair must have belonged to the prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ when he was a child, born and raised in this very cave, fostered and fed by angels and celestial foods! For twelve years he had lived secluded in this cave, the very cave Yūnus ﷺ and his friend were now sitting in.

Yūnus ﷺ explained all these things to his host and told him the whole story of Ibrāhīm ﷺ the prophet, and the man listened to him attentively. But he would not share Yūnus's ﷺ faith in the unseen God, for his heart was as full of love for his beloved cousin, he said, as was Yūnus's ﷺ with love for his God. Yūnus ﷺ spent the night in the cave and in the morning wished to depart speedily and press on towards Ninive as he had been commanded. The man implored him to stay a while,

for he had grown fond of Yūnus's ﷺ company, but Yūnus ﷺ felt that his mission could brook no delay, bade farewell to his friend and took to the road.

107 — RETURN TO NINIVE

BEFORE LONG he met an Assyrian horseman who recognized him and bade him welcome in the land of Assyria. He told Yūnus ﷺ that the whole land praised him for saving them from the plague, and that the king was very pleased and had promised him great honour and reward upon his return. Yūnus ﷺ was glad to hear this news and hoped it would make things easier for him. Arriving in Ninive, he went first to his own house and found it as he had left it, in good order in charge of his apprentice and friend. They were both happy to see each other and spoke for a long time, exchanging news. Yūnus ﷺ then informed the young man of the calling he had received in the desert, but this was something his apprentice could not understand, and he exclaimed, "What is this, an unseen God?! I think the plague has slightly touched your head!" and he passed on to other subjects. He told Yūnus ﷺ how one of the four lions the old potter had fashioned had been damaged and that he has tried unsuccessfully to mend it, and how glad he was that Yūnus ﷺ had returned to help him with this urgent task. News of Yūnus ﷺ arrival had swiftly spread through the town, and before long a courtier came to his house to escort him into the presence of the king. He led him not to the palace, but towards the great hill outside the gates, which they called their prayer mount. Yūnus ﷺ prepared himself for an unusual event.

When he reached the site, he found all the priests and magicians assembled around king's throne upon which sat the Assyrian king with a gloomy and despondent expression. The master of ceremonies mounted the platform and addressed the assembly. "We have gathered here today to seek interpretation of a dream which our illustrious monarch saw last night. He was very much disturbed by what he has seen; therefore all the priests and wise

men are called together today to divine its meaning. This is the king's dream: he beheld a great blaze issuing from his palace and spreading throughout the city, moving in this direction and devouring everything in its path. Not a soul knew what to do and everyone was helpless before this raging fire. It was a fearsome vision, and the king now wishes to understand its meaning and portent. So put together all your powers of divination and inform us of what you find." The magicians and priests set about their work of divining the meaning of this terrifying dream while the king's courtiers tried their best to cheer their king and to relieve his gloom. At last the chief priest, stood before the king and said, "O our lord and king, assuredly you are our king, and the god of the earth. Your dream is a message of warning from the god of the heavens: he informs you that your enemies are preparing a great war against you and that they wish to destroy your kingdom. You are forewarned and may take precautions." They then advised him to order his chief potter to make him an enormous idol before which the priests would offer human sacrifices in order to avert the calamity.

Yūnus ﷺ then went up to the platform and asked for permission to speak before the king, and it was the very first time he made a public address. "O my king," he said, "you are asking me to make a great new god, bigger than all the rest, that he might overpower them all. But there is no need for that at all, for He exists already, and has always existed: uncreated and the Creator of all beings. It is He who has given us this passing existence in this world while He, Allah Almighty, endures forever, having no beginning and no end and no man can know Him, much less depict Him." Thus Yūnus ﷺ preached according to his inspiration and the king listened to him while he spoke. The priests and magicians tried to interrupt him many times and cried, "How many times have we heard this before! How many have come to tell us about some great invisible being to which we should pray and bow our heads, and have we not driven them out before and stoned them! Must we now listen to this prattle again from the mouth of a stranger?" But the king silenced them and let Yūnus ﷺ finish his speech. After Yūnus ﷺ

had stopped speaking, the king solemnly announced his verdict: "I speak to you now as your king and as the Lord of the earth. It is clear to me that this man Yūnus ﷺ has been touched by the plague and his head has been affected. Therefore, as he is no longer in possession of his sanity; he shall be treated as a madman, and he is free to go and come as he pleases and to say what he likes. For that he saved the kingdom from destruction by the plague, I order all my subjects to leave him in peace and to do him no harm. I ask only that he report to me once every week and inform me of the number of converts he has made." The whole assembly laughed at this, but Yūnus ﷺ said, "If I tell you of my converts you will surely have them executed." The king answered, "I ask not their names, only their number." Some of the priests still objected, saying that the gods would surely be angered if he left Yūnus ﷺ free to preach against them, and that Yūnus ﷺ might possibly be an enemy agent in the assumed guise of a madman. But the king answered that the gods had not inspired him to take any measures against Yūnus ﷺ and that they should let him be or else risk the king's anger. He did, however, order many human sacrifices to be brought to the gods, and a great deal of innocent blood was split. Yūnus ﷺ was very distressed, but there was nothing in his power he could do to stop them.

Yūnus ﷺ went about his task of calling people to Islam with great fervour, day and night he roamed the streets of Ninive trying to find people who would accept his truth. But all the folk, mindful of the words of their king, took him for a madman and only smiled at him with mild forbearance, as people do at the feebleminded or children. They patted him on the back and took nothing he said seriously at all. The king received him every week and asked Yūnus ﷺ for the count of converts he had made, and always it was the same number: none. The king's priests and medicine-men tried out on Yūnus ﷺ every cure they could think of, for they considered him to be ill. But nothing changed, for the illness was not with him, but with them.

In this way Yūnus ﷺ continued to live and work for the sake of the Lord for twenty-one years and at times he was assailed

by doubts and fits of despondency and hopelessness. Then the angle Jibrā'īl ﷺ would be sent to him to give him new incentive to continue in his efforts. "The Lord is pleased with you, O Yūnus, even if you are seemingly ineffectual, you are performing His Will and are His obedient servant. For everything there is an appointed time: so continue to perform this service for the Lord's pleasure and think of nothing else." Yūnus's ﷺ fit of depression would then pass and he resumed his preaching with renewed vigour. From time to time he would go to visit his old friend and apprentice who had now become the king's potter, but even his closest friend refused to believe in his mission and prophethood. Their friendship continued nonetheless; he loved Yūnus ﷺ and entreated him with tears in his eyes to go to be cured by the priests and soothsayers, for he too thought him to have been affected by the plague he had helped to prevent.

108 – DISASTER FORETOLD: YŪNUS ﷺ BOARDS A SHIP

SO THE YEARS PASSED and there was no change for a long time. Until one day the angel appeared to Yūnus ﷺ and announced to him: "Now the time has come for you to warn these people that the punishment of Allah is nigh; if they refuse to believe, let them know that Divine Wrath will come upon them after 40 days ..." Yūnus ﷺ went out and began to warn the people of Ninive, but if they had not believed in him until this day, now they were most certainly convinced that he was a fool and they began to think him a nuisance. Word of his new approach came to the king who grew annoyed and when Yūnus ﷺ came to give him his weekly count of nil he said to him, "I have had great patience with you, Yūnus, for so many years, but now I must say to you that my patience has worn thin. If your threatened punishment does not occur after these forty days, then you are proven a liar, and you will not be able to escape from my punishment." Yūnus's ﷺ friend, the potter began to fear for Yūnus's ﷺ life, and he begged him to go to

the great temple and place himself in the hands of the healers there. Yūnus ﷺ went with him one day. But instead of asking the priests for their various notions and potions, Yūnus ﷺ began to preach to the assembled crowds there, and repeated his warnings of the divine punishment that was about to descend upon the stubborn and hard-hearted. Still nobody wanted to know and they shrugged their shoulders and turned from him with indifference.

Finally the morning of the fortieth day dawned, and Yūnus ﷺ could carry no more. His patience gave out and his anger took over. "O Lord," he cried, "I leave this deaf people to Your Wrath!" With that he departed from Ninive. He went towards the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates which was a wide delta, like the open sea, and there were many vessels travelling upon it. Yūnus ﷺ thought he would set out for the sea and approached the master of one ship. In those days, when a person went aboard a ship he was always asked whether he was a freeman or a slave, for the seamen would not burden themselves with runaway slaves. Yūnus ﷺ assured them that he was a freeman and embarked. Almost immediately he fell into a deep sleep. When they had sailed for a little while and reached the open sea, suddenly a great fish rose out of the waters, such as no one had ever seen before, and placed himself before the ship like a great wall, so that it could not pass. The seas ran high and the ship rocked dangerously and the monstrous fish threatened to sink the vessel. The crew and captain ran about in great agitation, knowing not what to do, and their despair was heightened when they perceived a black storm-cloud moving overhead in the direction of the city Ninive, so great and of such blackness that it could only be a foreboding of evil.

Yūnus ﷺ finally awoke, called to his senses by the loud crying and prevailing panic on board. They remembered their passenger then and came running to him, asking him whether there was something he had not told them about himself; had he, perhaps, committed a crime and was he running from punishment? For the fish had blocked the ship's passage and they felt he was demanding one of their number to be thrown to him

as a sacrifice, else he would destroy the whole ship and its crew. Yūnus ﷺ said, "I have committed no crime," but then it came to his mind like a flash of lightning: had he not succumbed to his old error of leaving the city of Ninive before the Lord had ordered him to do so, and was this not equal to committing a crime, as he was a prophet of the Lord? His impatience had misled him again, for no Divine revelation commanding him to leave had come to him yet. Now he realised that the fish must have been sent for him, and he told the boat people so. Yet they hesitated to throw him overboard, and it is related that they drew lots. Three times the lots were drawn and each time Yūnus's ﷺ name appeared, so that they finally accepted the decision and threw Yūnus ﷺ to the whale. The great fish caught Yūnus ﷺ in his mouth and let the boat pass by, and the storm abated.

The fish swallowed Yūnus ﷺ, but the Lord had spoken to the fish, "I have given Yūnus ﷺ into your belly, but he is not for you to eat and digest; I have imprisoned him in your belly and entrusted him to your care. He will make a mosque of your stomach." And in truth, Yūnus ﷺ in the belly of the whale prayed at all the prayer times and he called on his Lord incessantly, asking for mercy and forgiveness. His prayer was: *lā ilāha illā anta, subḥānaka, innī kuntu mina ẓ-ẓālimīn.*

"*And Dhu n-Nūn — when he went forth enraged and thought that We would have no power over him; then he called out in the darkness,*

'There is no God but Thou, Glory be to Thee! I have done evil.'

So We answered him, and delivered him out of grief; even so do We deliver the believers." [The Prophets, 21:87–88]

Therefore, it is said that if a believer is in distress or pain and he reads this verse twelve times, or as many times as he can, the Lord will deliver him out of his grief, as He delivered His prophet Yūnus ﷺ.

109 — NINIVE DELIVERED

THE PEOPLE BACK IN NINIVE saw the black cloud approaching, and something in their hearts told them that it was not a normal rain-laden cloud, it had an aura of evil about it. Suddenly they remembered Yūnus's ﷺ words and all he had patiently preached to them during the last twenty years, and the seeds he had sown came to a sudden and late fruition, as faith entered their hearts. Many people ran out to their prayer mount which they then renamed the "hill of repentance". Ahead of them all ran their king, and he ordered them all to make obeisance to the unseen God of Yūnus ﷺ and to pray for His mercy and forgiveness. Thus they put their heads to the ground and prayed that the punishment might be averted from them, even as the black cloud began to envelop them. A black fog drifted through the streets so thick they could scarcely see through it, accompanied by a terrifying low, rumbling noise, like a growl. Mothers forgot about their children, animals about their young; in terror all fell down on their faces and prostrated themselves in awe before the might of the unseen God. The repentance of their hearts was real and true, and at last they believed, just as doom was upon them. Then Allah had mercy on them, and He withdrew His Wrath before it had yet touched them, the cloud passed and with it the terror, and slowly it began to grow light again. This was the first and only time that Allah averted the punishment from a people He had threatened to destroy because of their last minute repentance. Nobody was harmed, and the only damage that occurred was to the idols of the temple — when people raised their heads to look they were seen all to have toppled from their pedestals, lying broken on the ground.

Just as everyone was getting over the shock and rising from their prostration of thanks, messengers came riding into the city, bearing further good news to the king: the armies of the Persians and Babylonians that had combined their forces to furtively attack Ninive, had suddenly turned upon each oth-

er and dispersed in total confusion. This was another miracle from their Lord, and they now remembered how many times Yūnus ﷺ had told them that the Lord has many unseen servants and soldiers of His own, and they set about looking for Yūnus ﷺ, but no one knew where he had gone.

As it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Why was there never a city that believed, and its belief profited it? Except the people of Yūnus; when they believed, We removed from them the chastisement of degradation in this present life, and We gave to them enjoyment for a time. And if thy Lord had willed, whoever is in the earth would have believed, all of them, all together. Wouldst thou then constrain the people, until they are believers? It is not for any soul to believe save by the leave of Allah and He lays abomination upon those who have no understanding. Say: 'Behold what is in the heavens and in the earth!' But neither signs nor warnings will avail a people who do not believe.*" [Yūnus, 10:98–101]

After some time the crew of Yūnus's ﷺ ship arrived back in Ninive and told the tale of how they had seen Yūnus ﷺ disappear in the mouth of the whale. Now people believed and regretted all the time they had stubbornly refused to learn from Yūnus ﷺ and had called him a madman and made life a burden for him. Now they needed a teacher to show them how to live in their new-found faith, and they had none to teach them. The king was no less ignorant than they, but he tried to console them, saying to them that Allah would surely show them a way, and that they should continue to give thanks for their salvation and survival.

Everyone in Ninive was happy but the priests and sorcerers who along with their idols had fallen from grace. They tried to spread rumours in order to regain their position saying that it had only been a natural storm and a coincidence that it had occurred on the very day Yūnusm ﷺ had foretold a disaster — and the king would have put them to death for their words, but that he remembered that Yūnus ﷺ had always abhorred the spilling of blood, so he spared them and had them driven into exile.

110 — YŪNUS ﷺ DISCHARGED FROM THE BELLY OF THE FISH

YŪNUS ﷺ COMPLETED his forty days' seclusion in the belly of the fish, and when they were over, the fish, by the command of the Lord Almighty, deposited him on dry land. It was a desert shore with no shade, and the sun beat down fiercely upon the burning sands. Yūnus ﷺ had nothing to protect his body with, as in the whale's belly all his clothes had been digested by the fish, and his skin, so long in darkness, had become very white and soft. He suffered great discomfort when he was thrown out upon the beach with no shelter. The Lord then caused a large-leafed gourd-vine to grow, and Yūnus ﷺ covered himself with its leaves and rested in its shade. He was too weak to move about, and the Lord sent a wild doe to him who bent over him and let him drink her milk. She came to him four times a day, and after a few days Yūnus ﷺ began to regain his strength.

One day a shepherd happened to be passing by that way, and to his surprise he noticed the vine that had suddenly grown in that waterless spot. He knew he had not seen it there before. Moreover, it was not rooted in the earth, but had roots reaching upward towards the sky. The shepherd had never seen such a sight and resolved to take a closer look. He approached the vine and came upon a man, covered only by the vine leaves, and of white and foreign appearance. He was greatly astonished and also curious and after greetings asked the man about himself. Yūnus ﷺ answered him, "I am Yūnus, the Hebrew, and I am a prophet of Allah Almighty, sent to the people of Ninive. I abandoned them in their hour of need and left the city without my Lord's permission, and for that my Lord has punished me and imprisoned me for forty days in the belly of a whale. Then, in His mercy, He returned me to dry land, and that is how you find me now." The shepherd did not believe a word of his story and, having never ventured beyond his grazing land, had no knowledge of Ninive. But he had a

good heart, and he looked after Yūnus ﷺ and took care of him in his own hut, until he was strong enough to venture out and about by himself.

One day that shepherd met a band of travellers coming from Ninive, and from them he heard what had befallen, and he knew then that Yūnus ﷺ had told him the truth. He went and told Yūnus ﷺ what he had heard. When Yūnus ﷺ heard that Ninive had been saved at the last moment because its people had repented and believed at last, he cried out, "Ah, woe is me! Had they only embraced the truth while I was living amongst them; for so many years they despised me and called me a madman, and now they are not even punished ..." After those words the vine which had sheltered him dried up and withered, and Yūnus ﷺ complained to the Lord that he had nothing with which to cover himself. The Lord then addressed Yūnus ﷺ and said, "O My prophet, you lament over a thing which I have caused to grow and to wither within one single day; do you not understand how I, the Lord Almighty, might feel grief about destroying a whole city and its inhabitants which I have created and fostered for so many years?" Yūnus ﷺ understood and quickly repented.

The Holy Qur'ān relates:

"*Yūnus, too was one of the Envoys; when he ran away to the laden ship and cast lots, and was of the rebutted, then the whale swallowed him down, and he blameworthy. Now had he not been of those that glorify Allah, he would have tarried in its belly until the day they shall be raised; but We cast him upon the wilderness, and he was sick, and We caused to grow over him a tree of gourds. Then We sent him unto a hundred thousand, or more, and they believed; so We gave them enjoyment for a while.*" [The Rangers, 37:139–148]

The shepherd meanwhile had grown very fond of Yūnus ﷺ and became his devoted follower. When Yūnus ﷺ was still too weak to walk, he brought a wooden watering-trough and made in it a bed of sheep-skins. To this he tied a rope which he attached to his dog's collar, and so he pulled the sick man about. The dog recognized the prophet of Allah and showed him great respect, taking care not to jostle him around too much in his "cradle", for his skin was still very tender.

One day Yūnus ﷺ said to his friend, the shepherd, "O my friend, what will the owner of your flocks say when he finds out that you are devoting so much of your time to my care, instead of minding his sheep for which he pays you wages?" The shepherd answered, "O my prophet, since your coming, many wonderful things have begun to happen: where there grew not a blade of grass now there are lush green meadows and running streams. The flocks have multiplied fourfold in this short time — how should he have aught to complain about?" But one day Yūnus ﷺ overheard an unknown voice berating the shepherd, saying, "What are you doing here and who is this man in your company, what is your business with him?" The owner of the flock had come, and as Yūnus ﷺ had suspected, he was a disagreeable man. The shepherd answered him, "This man whom I have found naked and destitute on the desert shore is a prophet of Allah. Ever since he has dwelt with me, I milk twice a day and the ewes give twin births, and all blessings have increased through the presence of this holy one." Now the owner had heard that the king of Ninive was seeking a man named Yūnus of whom it was said that he was a prophet, and that whoever brought him was promised a handsome reward. So he said to the shepherd, "Lead me to him, so that I too may see this holy man." But the shepherd grew aware of his selfish intention, and made an excuse, saying that Yūnus ﷺ had just gone away that very day, and he pointed in a direction away from where Yūnus ﷺ lay hidden. The owner and his men set out in pursuit.

Yūnus ﷺ saw that it was time for him to leave the shepherd, and he too set out. By eventide he had reached the shelter of a cave. He was hungry and very tired. The doe that had given him milk came again to him and fed him, then she stayed by his side and gave him warmth. In the middle of the night Yūnus ﷺ awoke from the sound of soft singing, and he recognized the voice of his friend, the shepherd. Yūnus ﷺ called out to him, "Why are you here, my good friend? Have you run away from your master?" "No," replied the shepherd, "my master is gone and will return no more. He became obsessed by the idea of reward for your capture, and so he continued his search until

long into the night, even though I had warned him not go by darkness, for the area is full of dangerous cracks and crevices. But he would not listen, and so he met his doom." The shepherd joined Yūnus ﷺ and remained with him from that time on.

III — YŪNUS ﷺ RETURNS ONCE MORE TO NINIVE

EVERY DAY YŪNUS ﷺ would go down to the sea and gaze at it, and watch the fish as they jumped out of the water, playing in the sun. The greatest one of them would often turn towards Yūnus ﷺ and look at him for a long time, as if he was greeting him or trying to communicate. One day he seemed to be holding a shining thing in his mouth, and he swam closer and threw the object upon the beach. Yūnus ﷺ recognized him as the fish who had swallowed him for forty days, and he also recognized the shining object as the property of the king. He took this as a sign and said to his friend, "Go now to the king and tell him that you have met me, but do not yet inform him of my whereabouts. Tell him I send him my greetings and give him back his necklace as a token that you speak the truth. Take with you also some of the earth I have been sitting on, for it will bear my smell, and this twig I have held in my hand, and this tame doe who gave me milk. Tell the king that I hope to be in his company soon, as soon as I am strong enough." The shepherd set out, and it was as Yūnus ﷺ had said, the king recognized Yūnus's ﷺ smell from the handful of earth and the twig that his hand had held, and he longed to see Yūnus ﷺ. But the shepherd delivered his message and was gone before anyone could follow him. He returned to Yūnus ﷺ and continued to nurse him. When he had entirely recovered, Yūnus ﷺ said to the shepherd, "Come now, let us go together, for you must claim your just reward from the king for having brought me to him." "Never will I do that," said the shepherd, "I ask not for riches or reward, all I ask for is your blessed company." Yūnus

عليه السلام accepted him as his companion but advised him to accept the reward as well and to distribute it among those more needy than he.

So together they returned to Ninive and great was the rejoicing and the reception at his return! After some days of ceremony and festivities, Yūnus عليه السلام began to restore the order of things, repairing the temples that had crumbled and turning them into mosques and *madrasas* (places of religious teaching) and he trained teachers in the ways of Islam, so that people would know how to practise their religion and the holy laws.

Yūnus عليه السلام settled down in Ninive at last, and according to one tradition, it was then that he got married. One tradition relates that he married a very good wife, while another relates that his wife was terribly bad-tempered, a malicious shrew. One day she made an embarrassing scene in front of a whole house full of guests, but Yūnus عليه السلام held his peace and said not a word. Being asked by his sympathetic friends why he put up with so much abuse, Yūnus عليه السلام answered, "I have got what I have asked for. I prayed to the Lord to be given the punishment of the hereafter in this life already. In answer to my prayer the Lord ordered me to take the daughter of a certain man for a wife, and I would be able to know the torments of hell!"

Therefore, Sayyidinā 'Alī has said, "A bad-tempered woman is a punishment of hell in this life."

112 — OLD HABITS DIE HARD: THE FALL OF NINIVE AND YŪNUS'S عليه السلام END

FOR SOME YEARS all went well in Ninive, but after a time the memory of the calamity gradually faded, and again it was seen that old habits die hard. People slowly began to take up their old ways again, for the new forms of worship did not completely satisfy their craving for excitement. They yearned for the old songs and dances, the feastings and fairs they had always celebrated in the time of the idols. So they began to fashion new ones in stealth and secretly reverted to their ignorance. Yūnus

ﷺ was very sad when he perceived this and redoubled his efforts in preaching and teaching the truth, but his words fell on deaf ears once again.

One day the king called for him, and his face was long, "O Yūnus," said the king, "all our neighbours are making fun of us because we have done away with all the artful statues we had afore. They say, we worship a god no one can see or understand, a being that does not exist, they say. They think of us as fools and as weaklings. I have decided to lift the restrictions on idolatry, and leave everyone free to worship what he will. So, oppress my people no longer with your talk, for I have permitted them to do as they like."

Clearly the exiled wizards and warlocks had found their way back into the city and their words had entered the king's heart, so that he would listen to no counsel from the prophet. More and more it was being said that the calamity that had in truth been averted only through the mercy of Allah, had been nothing but a natural storm that had blown over, and that people had been hypnotized by Yūnus the madman's words. They began to think and feel as they had done before and their hearts become obscured once more. Again Yūnus ﷺ went before the king to warn him, and he said, "O my king, think not that the Lord does not hear or see just because you do not see or hear Him! Once He averted evil from you and withheld His Wrath, but what will you do when it comes upon you the next time? Then it will not come as rain from the skies alone, but it will rise up out of the ground, and you will be surrounded and routed, and your kingdom will crumble to dust! What will you do then?" But the king waved him away as he had done before and turned a deaf ear to the prophet's last warnings.

Meanwhile the lord of Ninive had decided on a campaign against Samaris, Yūnus's ﷺ native land, as a demonstration of his power. When he returned victorious his belief in the gods and idols of Assyria was reinforced, and so he intended war on the kingdom of Judah as well. What he did not know was that in the meantime all the believers had left Samaria and emigrated to Judah. Yūnus ﷺ warned him that Allah would not let the

believers perish at his hand, but the king's heart was now hardened against him, and he set out with a huge army, followed by many thousands of settlers, assuming that success and victory most certainly would be his. He made so light of this matter that he divided his army in two, sending off one troupe towards Egypt, so that he might take that territory as well and become emperor of the entire realm.

When the army stood ready to attack Judah, unexpectedly and seemingly from nowhere a great storm arose and enveloped heaven and earth in total blackness, so that they were forced to give up any idea of attack. Turning back, they encountered the king accompanying the Egyptian brigade, and the anger of the king sent them back once more towards Judah. As before, the Lord stopped them, this time plague broke out among the men and the army perished to a man, while none of the Judaeans were touched by the blight. The king's army was defeated in Egypt, and in his absence from Ninive, the Persians and Babylonians had attacked the near defenseless capital, and so came the end of the Assyrian glory. The king himself had died in battle and many of the survivors were led into slavery.

Yūnus ﷺ had also lost his family in the wars. They had fled into the mountains, where his wife died of exposure and hunger, while one of his sons was eaten by a wolf and the other perished in the wilderness. Yūnus ﷺ mourned his loss, and the Lord addressed him, "O Yūnus, you grieve for your family, and they were only few. Do you not think that I also grieve when I am called to destroy my creatures, so many hundreds and thousands that have died in this battle? Therefore curse no one ever again, and pray only for the good!"

Yūnus ﷺ lived not much longer after these events, he had grown old and weary. He continued his preaching and called to Allah as long as he had the strength, but one day he fell ill and felt the approach of death. He then prepared himself and his burial place, and one morning after the dawn prayer he surrendered his soul to Him Who is the Giver of life and death. His tomb is now venerated at Baghdad.

May Allah have mercy on him and grant peace to his soul.

113 — ISKANDAR (DHU L-QARNAYN)

THERE IS DISAGREEMENT among the scholars as to whether Iskandar was a prophet or only a great and just king. The Holy Prophet ﷺ, when questioned about this replied, "He was a king and travelled over the whole world; whether he was a prophet, only Allah Almighty knows, and they dispute also concerning Luqmān."

MUJĀHID ق relates: "There have been four kings who ruled over the whole of the earth. Two of them were believers and two were infidels. The believers were Sulaymān and Iskandar, the unbelievers were Nimrūd and Nebukadnezzar."

In the Holy Qur'ān he is mentioned:

"They will question thee concerning Dhu l-Qarnayn. Say, 'I will recite to you a mention of him.' We established him in the land, and We gave him a way to everything; and he followed a way until when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring, and he found nearby a people.

We said, 'O Dhu l-Qarnayn, either thou shalt chastise them, or thou shalt take towards them a way of kindness.' He said, 'As for the evildoer, him we shall chastise, then he shall be returned to his Lord and He shall chastise hi with a horrible chastisement. But as for him who believes, and does righteousness, he shall receive as recompense the reward most fair, and we shall speak to him, of our command, easiness.'

Then he followed a way until, when he reached the rising of the sun, he found it rising upon a people for whom We had not appointed any veil to shade them from it. So; and We encompassed in knowledge what was with him. Then he followed a way until, when he reached between the two barriers, he found this side of them a people scarcely able to understand speech.

They said, 'O Dhu l-Qarnayn, behold, Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj are doing corruption in the earth; so shall we assign to thee a tribute, against thy setting up a barrier between us and between them?' He said, 'That where

in my Lord has established me is better, so aid me forcefully, and I will set up a rampart between you and between them. Bring me ingots of iron!' Until, when he had made all level between the two cliffs, he said, 'Blow!' Until, when he had made it a fire, he said, Bring me that I may pour molten brass on it.' So they were unable either to scale it or pierce it. He said, 'This is a mercy from my Lord. But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will make it into powder; and my Lord's promise is ever true.'" [The Cave, 18:83–98]

'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās ﷺ reports: "When Muḥammad, our Holy Prophet ﷺ, peace and blessings be upon him, took the city of Mecca, and the unbelievers were powerless against him, they turned to the Jews of Khaybar for help. The Jews said, 'We will test him to see whether he is a true prophet or not, from the knowledge written in our books.' So they prepared twenty-eight very difficult questions to be put to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and Abū Jahl was the one who brought these questions back to Mecca, sure in his heart that the Prophet ﷺ would know no answer to what the learned Jews had asked. He said to Muḥammad ﷺ, 'If you want us to believe in you, inform us of the Spirit, of the Companions of the Cave and of Dhu l-Qarnayn.' The Holy Prophet ﷺ had never heard these stories until that time, but confident that the angel would bring him the answers through inspiration, he said, 'I will give you the answers tomorrow.' But he forgot to add, *inshā'Allāh* — so God wills — and for this reason the angel did not appear to him for a full fortnight. The unbelievers thought that he was now exposed as a fraud and mocked him, jesting, 'His god has now forgotten him, or is he angered against him?' The Holy Prophet ﷺ heard their derisive speech and prayed to the Lord Almighty to show him a sign. At noon on a Friday the angel appeared to him and said,

"And do not say, regarding anything, 'I am going to do that tomorrow,' but only, 'If Allah will'; and mention thy Lord when thou forgettest, and say, 'It may be that my Lord will guide me unto something nearer to rectitude than this.'" [The Cave, 18:23–24]

Thereafter he taught him the answers to all the questions the Jews had asked. When he informed them, the Jews all came to believe in him, but Abū Jahl never did.

AT-TABARĀNĪ ج writes: "This Iskandar is he who is called Dhu l-Qarnayn, for *qarn* in Arabic means 'horn', *qarnayn* thus meaning two horns, for he has brought the two horns of the East and the West together; and the ends of a bow are also called 'horns'. He has made a dam between two mountains in the east, and has prevented Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj from passing over it, until the end of time."

Iskandar was born as the son of King Philipp of Macedonia and his queen Olympias. At the hour of his birth his horoscope was cast, and the king was told that the whole of the known world would pass into his son's dominion, but that his life would be short. They said he would live no more than fifty years, and should he survive that age, he would live on to three-hundred. The king loved his son very much and took great care to have him educated by the best teachers, and so Iskandar learned many skills in his youth. Aristotle was his greatest teacher and he kept the company of all the wisest men of his time. When he was barely twenty years of age his father, King Philip, was assassinated and Iskandar ascended the throne. His very first achievement was to unite the cities of Greece under his rule, and in spite of his extreme youth, he ruled with wisdom beyond his years. Next he mustered a large army and set out for Asia Minor and took all the land around Bursa, Izmir, up to Tokat. He hardly encountered any resistance, and many cities opened their gates to him without coercion, for it quickly became known that he ruled with a light hand and neither enslaved the people he conquered, nor imposed heavy taxes on them. He reinstated the local rulers after receiving their oath of fealty and then passed on.

114 — SUBJUGATION OF THE CANNIBALS

ONE DAY when he was holding court, a deputation from Egypt came before him, and they were in great distress. "The wild tribes of Abyssinia have fallen upon us and are destroying our civilization," they complained to Iskandar. "They are

barbarians and cannibals and they destroy everything that falls in their path. We have come to you seeking protection; help us against them and we offer you Egypt in return; we will make you our king." Iskandar consulted with his vizier, and as he agreed to the campaign, Iskandar mustered a huge army made up of recruits from the newly conquered provinces, and marched with them towards Egypt. There they confronted the wild tribes that had come up from the south, but found that they were many and not easily defeated. Iskandar lost many men. Finally, he sent one of his viziers to them as an envoy to offer them a truce and acceptable conditions for their withdrawal. The chief of that tribe had the envoy seized, and in the presence of the whole court and Iskandar's delegation he was slaughtered and his blood collected in a large vessel. This vessel the chief set to his lips and emptied in one draught. "I will drink the blood of them all as I have drunk this man's," he said to them, laughing wildly and showing his sharp teeth.

The delegation returned with this tale, and Iskandar's soldiers were fearful now of the barbarians, and withdrew to their barracks. Iskandar's vizier said to him, "Iron is only smitten by iron, my king. We must take corresponding measures." "And what do you have in mind?" asked Iskandar. The vizier replied, "Have a few of the wild black men rounded up and let them be slaughtered before the assembled court, then let them be cooked. Say you wish to try this new food. When it is set before you and you have tasted the soup, you will say, 'Ah, had I only known what a delicacy black flesh is, I would never have bothered eating the flesh of white men. This is so much tastier.' The prisoners who are made to witness this performance will go back to their chief and report." Iskandar accepted his vizier's suggestion, but of course he never ate human flesh, but had it replaced by a sheep; the wild men were tricked nonetheless and returned to tell their comrades what they had seen. Fear of Iskandar spread among their ranks and their courage began to wane. The next day they engaged in battle and no decision was reached, so the battle was continued the next day. In the end Iskandar's armies proved to have the greater discipline,

and the cannibal tribes were driven into flight after their grossly over-dimensional chieftain had been killed. They fled back into the bush and Egypt was delivered. It passed into Iskandar's rule and so his realm grew. He had taken over 20,000 prisoners though, and he had their faces scarified with two vertical lines down their cheeks, as it continues to be the custom in Sudan and Abyssinia to this very day. He went on to found the city of Iskandariyya (Alexandria). He erected a light tower there that could be seen by ships at sea from a distance of many miles, and he set upon it a revolving reflector of a mirroring material which shone so brightly that it could be seen by ships one month's journey away. This was Iskandar's gift to the people of Egypt.

115 — ISKANDAR'S STRUGGLE WITH DARIUS

DARIUS WAS KING of Persia. Iskandar sent him his greetings and accompanied them with gifts, a caravan loaded with precious jewels and silken cloths and brocades from the countries he had conquered. He sent him also 3000 slave-girls and 3000 pages. When Darius received these gifts, his heart was filled with envy. "How can it be," he said, "that this youth, a mere boy, has brought so much of the world into his possession?" He sent him an answer, saying that it was only right that he should surrender to Darius, the rightful king of the world, all that he had captured and acquired on his campaigns. Should he refuse to acknowledge his sovereignty and to pay tribute to him, Darius would be forced to wage war against him. Iskandar received this message from Darius and said, "What a strange way of giving thanks. Why should I oblige Darius? I have fought and I have won, why should I pay tribute to this king?" And he sent a message to Darius by return messenger, saying, "Who can take a morsel from the mouth of the lion? Try who might! The bird that laid golden eggs fell ill one day and ate one of its own eggs, whereupon it died. If you desire more riches, you must fight for them, I am not your subject. Iskandar."

The next day Iskandar went out to hunt. He came to a rock and saw two partridges fighting on it. Watching them, he gave them both names: one he called by his own name and the other Darius. In the end the bird he called Iskandar had won, and the other bird, Darius, took flight. This he took as an omen. He returned to his counsellors and advisors and informed them of his decision and they all stood behind him. He also assured himself of the support of the kings of the conquered regions. They all were pleased to go to war against Persia, for they were long oppressed by the heavy burden of tribute which Darius imposed on them. Iskandar on the other hand ruled with leniency and justice, so they sided with him. Again Iskandar sent word to Darius and warned him of the allegiance formed against him, but Darius responded with arrogance and pride, and sent back in answer a child's toy and a bag of rice. "Let him play his games with this toy and he will see that I shall scatter his armies like grains of rice." The messenger came before Iskandar and poured the rice on the ground before him. "This is Darius' answer: he will come with an army as numerous as the grains of rice in this bag." Iskandar laughed, and took up the ball and stick which he had sent as well. "This ball is Darius," he said, "and this stick is my power. My force will drive him along as this ball is driven by this stick," — and he hit the ball with the stick so that it flew a great distance through the air. Then he had a rooster brought in, and the bird picked up all the grains of rice from the ground till there were none left. "He may bring as many soldiers against me as he likes, I will have yet more to meet him."

Darius flew into a great rage when he received this reply, and he ordered a huge army to be mustered, counting 900,000 fighting men. Iskandar was informed of this gigantic army standing against him, but he said, "What do you fear? Even for 100,000 oxen one knife is sufficient, and 100,000 sheep are still only sheep." Then he mustered his own army and they were 600,000 men; they were true and devoted to Iskandar and preferred to fight to the death for him than to being dominated by the tyrant Darius.

One of Darius's oldest and wisest counsellors said to him, "O my king, I have heard it foretold by my grandfather who heard it from his father before him that one day there would arise a wind from the west which would sweep before it all men like dust. I believe this time has now come: this young man from Macedonia has come and it seems to be his lot to conquer all the regions of the world and none can stand against him. I believe it would be better if you made your peace with him and arranged favourable terms, for whatever is written will come to pass." Darius raged at his words, and said, "Were it not for your advanced age and your many years of loyal service, I would have you put to death as a traitor on the spot! Who are you to tell me what to do and how to rule? Should I then humble myself before a mere upstart without even engaging in battle?" The old man fell silent, and events took their course.

Darius wrote another provocative letter to young Iskandar saying, "O young man! Who are you to challenge me, the mightiest sovereign on earth, while you are but a tender shoot of no account! If you do not give up your designs, I will truly march against you and crush every blade of grass that grows in your country! Who are you that you aspire to rule the whole world? I am the descendant of an ancient dynasty of kings whose beginnings are lost in the dawn of time, while you have nothing to support your claims. Back off from your insolence, and I will forbear from fighting you, otherwise beware! How can a scorpion presume to do battle with a dragon?" Iskandar replied, "How mistaken you are, great Darius! You believe it was your grandfather who gave you the kingdom you rule, while in truth it is none but the Almighty God Allah through whose favour you have come to enjoy your kingship. You and your throne were not born together when you existed in your mother's womb, it was given to you by the Almighty Lord, so give thanks and bow down before Him! For what He has given to you, He may also take from you one day — know this well before you go to war against me! As Ibrāhīm ﷺ was rescued from the fires of the mighty Nimrūd, so I hope to be saved from

your fires. And if I succeed, I shall put out all the fires in your temples, and all your realm shall be taught to worship Allah Almighty to whom belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth."

So they exchanged letters for a while, each trying to dissuade the other from doing battle. On one occasion Iskandar sent Darius's messenger back, saying that he would send his own vizier with his reply, while he disguised himself and went to the court of Darius, pretending to be his own vizier. He was received with full honours and was offered refreshment. He drank, then he placed the golden goblet in the folds of his robe. Questioned about his action, he replied that this was the custom of the viziers of Iskandar. Darius ordered the goblet to be filled to the brim with gems and precious stones and Iskandar accepted the gift. But one of Darius's retainers who had been to Iskandar's camp recognized Iskandar and whispered this into Darius's ear. Darius thereupon had Iskandar's cup filled up again and again, hoping to make him drunk and then to bind him when he was senseless. But Iskandar grew aware of their plotting and quickly sought a pretext. He mounted his horse and was gone like the wind. A thousand horsemen were sent after him to apprehend him as he fled, and they caught up with him in a forest. The captain of the troop approached Iskandar and said, "We have been sent to take you captive, but it is really our wish to fight Darius under your command; will you accept us as your soldiers?" Iskandar accepted and thanked them, and they went with him to his camp.

The next day was the day of the battle. It was long and arduous fighting, and twice the army of Iskandar was forced to retreat, but each time they rallied round again, and, by the grace of the Almighty, they were victorious in the end. Darius himself was forced to flee, and his army dispersed. Iskandar took possession of those territories and did not pursue Darius. He went instead to Damascus where the treasures of the Persians were being kept, and he appropriated them as booty. After four months, Darius had reassembled an army and they engaged once more in battle. Again Darius was defeated and

fled to Media, while Iskandar took possession of Babylon and Susa. He addressed the Persians, "O people of Pars, for the sake of Ibrāhīm Khalil and his religion: if you leave off your worship of fire I will not harm you; whoever accepts me as king, may remain in his place, but whoever is opposed to me, let him go and follow after Darius." The Persians all replied, "We prefer to stay where we are, even if you put us to death." All of Darius's family were in Iskandar's power, and he treated them well, according to their dignity.

Meanwhile Darius was very hard-pressed by this turn of events, and said to his ministers, "The Greek has come and has taken from us our pride and power, and our children are in his hands. What can we do?" His counsellors advised him to write a conciliatory letter to Iskandar, asking for safe passage for their families, and to endure what they could not change, for they no longer had sufficient fighting power. Darius was displeased with this, but he had no choice, so he wrote to Iskandar: "Up until now I have been king over all these lands, and now I should be your slave? I ask you only to return my family to me, whereas all the treasures left to me by my forefathers shall be yours." Iskandar answered him saying, "You may return to your throne, I will return to you the kingship over this land, and no harm has come to your families who are in my care." When he received this message again Darius was angry and said, "What! Now I shall be king at my enemy's command, no better than a slave? That is worse to me than death!" and he refused the offer of peace. He gathered around him what little was left of his troops and prepared their last stand. However, two of his barons had rebelled in the east and conspired against him, and they now laid hands upon Darius and took him hostage. They sent word to Iskandar asking what price he would pay for Darius's head. Iskandar at once set out for Bactria, but before he could reach the place where Darius was held, they had already murdered him. The two traitors were eventually arrested and Iskandar executed them for their treachery and for usurping the throne.

According to one account, Iskandar reached Darius as he lay dying in his tent in a pool of blood. Iskandar entered and

laid Darius's head upon his knee and said, "I am Iskandar, and it was not my doing or intention that these two traitors carried out. Let my doctors look after you and give you treatment." But Darius knew that all help had come too late. He said to Iskandar, "No, my time on earth is over. I ask of you three things: to avenge my death on those who have caused it; to do no harm to my people whom you have conquered; and thirdly, to marry my only daughter — perhaps she will bear you a son, so that my name will not be wholly forgotten." Iskandar promised to fulfill his wishes, and Darius surrendered his soul with a sigh. Iskandar wept and grieved for him, for he felt bereaved of a great and noble enemy, and he had him buried in a shroud placed upon his throne. He then sent a letter to the widow of Darius, telling of the last events in Darius's life and of his bequest. Both mother and daughter were pleased to accept his offer, and after a period of mourning, the girl Nevrushan was married to Iskandar. According to other sources, Iskandar married Roxana, the daughter of the Bactrian king, whose beauty was renowned. Through this marriage his rule over those eastern regions became firmly established.

All men hailed him as their king, and he ruled and reordered the empire with wisdom and tolerance. He spoke to Darius's oldest minister, the one who had advised against the campaign. Iskandar asked him, "How old are you?" "I am 400 years old," answered the old man. "Then you have seen a great many things in your time and must have acquired much wisdom," said Iskandar, "how is it that you did not advise your king, Darius, against this foolishness of his?" The old vizier said, "Ah, how many times I counselled him against this move, but he never listened to me, and clearly this was destined to become his undoing." Iskandar understood that he was indeed a wise man, and he asked him about many things he wanted to know. Then he rewarded the old man for his faithful service and sent him home to retire. The next day it was reported to him, that the old man had died that very night.

116 — ISKANDAR'S QUEST FOR WISDOM

ISKANDAR THEN CONTINUED on his travels, and eventually a problem arose: his men had collected so much booty on their campaigns that they knew not how to travel on with this heavy load. Iskandar convened a conference at which all his wise men were present, and he asked them for their suggestions. His advisor Bilinaz thought for a while, then he spoke, "Let them all bury their treasures in a certain place and pick it up when they return this way." So Iskandar gave orders for every man to bury his treasure and to mark the place. The men went up into the mountains and dug holes and caves, placed their booty within and sealed their hiding places with certain talismans and seals so that no one could raid them. Then they dug a deep well at the bottom of the treasure cave, and at its base they placed a wheel, and they dug an underground tunnel. At the mouth of the wheel they placed another wheel, and directed a spring in the cave to run over the wheels. Bilinaz connected those wheels with the charm of the talismans, so that no man who knew not the code could open the secrets of this place. Having thus secured their treasures, Iskandar and his armies passed on, and he visited a great many countries, but he stayed nowhere for very long, for he wished to see the whole wide world.

He had met Bilinaz in Azerbaijan. There was a mountain there called Serhad by some, and Derdan by others, and between two of its peaks there was an important centre for the cult of the fire-worshippers. Iskandar advanced and destroyed this place and the superstitions connected with it. Now among the priests there was a very beautiful woman who was a witch. When she saw that destruction was inevitable, she quickly turned herself into a dragon, and attacked to do whatever damage she could. Iskandar turned to Aristoteles and asked him what to do. Aristoteles replied, "There is a man here called Bilinaz who may know what is to be done." They called for him, and as soon as Bilinaz saw the dragon he knew it was a trick of magic. He called to the witch in the Assyrian language,

and her spell was broken, and she was forced to assume her human shape again. Then they apprehended and bound her, and brought her before Iskandar. Bilinaz said, "Sire, I have bound the witch, now will you give her to me?" Iskandar said, "All right, she is yours, but beware of her snares." From this witch Bilinaz learned much about the magic arts and for that reason he is called, "He who learned from witches."

Iskandar was told of a certain country where only women were suffered to live, their rulers being likewise women. Their queen was said to be a good and virtuous lady, but for forty years no stranger had seen her face, no one was ever allowed to approach her when she was unveiled. Her servants were exclusively women who like her had never known a man — a court of virgin queens. Iskandar very much wanted to see this woman in person, and though his advisors tried to discourage him, he disguised himself as an ambassador of a foreign king, and came to the court of the Queen Nushiya, for that was her name. She received him from behind her veils, and after they had talked for a while she said to him, "Never have I seen a more foolish person than thee, O Iskandar. You have achieved dominion over the whole world and yet you find it necessary to disguise yourself in order to trick us. You may think I have fallen into your trap, but it is actually you who has fallen into mine." Then she descended from her throne and said, „You may sit on it, for after all that is what you have come for." That evening she gave a banquet for him, and while all the guests were served food on their plates, she had ordered that Iskandar's plate and cup should be filled only with gems and precious stones, pearls, corals and amber, things that delight the eye but cannot be eaten. Iskandar asked at last what was the meaning of keeping him hungry, and he was told: "Is this not what you wanted? For in your country, is there nothing to eat that you should come here to find your dinner?" Iskandar then took leave of the queen, for he no longer felt safe or trustful in that all-female company. The queen said to him in parting, "Fear not, I will not kill you, for I see that you are a righteous man. But be advised not to play this trick a second time." When Iskandar rode out through

the palace gates and had gained open ground, he heaved a sigh of relief and thanked the Almighty for having delivered him from the wiles of women.

Returning to his own encampment, he sent an invitation to the queen, and the next day she rode over to see him. She had with her a book in which were sketched portraits of all the kings on earth, and in it she had found also Iskandar's likeness. She showed it to him, and again he began to fear her, believing her in possession of hidden powers of witchcraft. She said to him, "You think that because I am a woman I must be silly in the head or else a witch. But in truth I have come to know a great many things, and a part of wisdom I can also call mine. I have understood that you are to be the destined ruler of my realm, as was foretold many ages ago, and what is written must come to pass. Here then are the keys to my city — I have abdicated my throne and surrender all power to you, my king."

Iskandar took the keys from her hands, and spent a long time with her in learned discourse. Then he set a prince over the city and set out to explore the far reaches of the world. "I wish to see what none has seen before me," he said, "and I will not return until I have achieved this aim." Along with him went a great division of his army and his host of wisemen. It was his habit to travel in the company of six groups of people: seers and holy men, sages and philosophers, ascetics and sorcerers. Whenever he met resistance that could not be overcome by military means, he turned to the saints in his retinue and asked them to pray for a good outcome, and if his cause was just, the Lord would answer their prayers. When pious prayers brought no results, he at times resorted to the service of his magicians and sorcerers. His aim was to unite the whole world under his rule and to rule with goodness and justice.

One day he heard of a certain great saint living in the land he was passing through, and he sent his servants to invite him to come to visit him, so that he might profit from the saint's wisdom. Seven times they went out with the invitation, and each time they were refused. The saint said, "What business have I with him; if he so wishes to see me, he can come here." Finally

Iskandar made up his mind one day and went to visit the saint. He was lying in the sun and made no move to rise when the king's visit was announced. Iskandar knelt beside him and gently shook him for he thought he might be asleep. But the saint was not asleep at all and when he saw the king kneeling by his side, his attitude changed not a bit. Iskandar greeted him and asked, "Why is it that you show me such disrespect and heedlessness?" The saint replied, "It is you who are heedless, not I! You are proud of this kingdom you have obtained, and yet it will last no longer than a day or two." "Why did you not come to me when I had you summoned seven times? I failed not in the expression of my respect for your age and wisdom?" The saint replied, "If a man is satisfied with eating grass, what business of yours is it? If a man has attained familiarity with his Lord, what does he want of the Sultan thereafter?" Iskandar then said to him, "Ask of me whatever you wish, I will grant it to you." But the saint answered him, "I have two slaves: one of them is lust, the other is anger, and I have subjected them to my will. As for you, you are the slave of these two. I have made them obedient to me while you obey them, is it not so?" Iskandar then felt ashamed before this saint and begged him to give him advice. The saint then spoke at length, and this was his discourse:

"Try with all your might to polish the mirror of your heart so that you might see all things clearly and truly reflected, and you may know by the light of certain knowledge. Wherever you may go, do not forget the Almighty, keep remembrance of Him n your heart always. Do not hurt the lowly and impoverished, and respect learning in whatever form you may find it. Practise piety as much as you are able to and never tell a lie; keep your promises and never fall back on your word."

"There are four signs of mindlessness: firstly, to hold counsel with the foolish; secondly, to spend money in the wrong places; thirdly, not to keep the company of wise men, and fourthly, not to learn from experience. You must strive to be an example for your people, and let not the people be an example for you."

"Four things there are which bring contempt in this world and the next: haughtiness, self-conceit, slander and thinking ill

of people, and avaricious greed. If you wish for success in this world and the world to come, you must leave behind you these four characteristics, O Iskandar. If someone behaves towards you with insolence, are you not angry at him? You are but a created being, and you feel anger when you are shown ill manners. Do everything within your power not to risk the anger of the King of Kings, the Almighty and Eternal Creator, for misbehaving at His Court!"

Iskandar had all these words written down by his scribes. He then kissed the saint's hand and returned to his camp. He seated himself upon his throne and called to him Aristoteles and his other wisemen and philosophers, and addressed them, saying, "I cannot remain in one place for very long, for I have yet the whole world before me. Please do write down your wisdoms for me and give me your advice for my future journeys!"

The first one to present his book of precepts was Aristoteles. He had written, "O my king, keep the company of sensible people, for whatever is happening in the world, people of reason will be the first to notice it. Keep the counsel of intelligent men, and above all, fear Allah and be forever mindful of His All-encompassing Might, for whoever fears his Lord his works will be deemed lawful. And whoever fears Him not will not prosper. Foster not envy in your heart, for the envious will come to blame. If a person is guilty, punish not his brother in his stead. Do not place women in the seat of command, for they are deficient in mind and character. And choose not men of ill character to lead others, for they will only propagate their own evil. If there are two people who are both your enemies, try to turn them against each other, and you will emerge unscathed. When you send your ambassador to a strange place, be very sure of whom you are sending, for he will be seen as your representative and you will be judged accordingly. If you collect booty in a country, do not forget to distribute some of this wealth among the dervishes and mendicants and always try to make them pleased with you, so that they pray for your benefit and victory."

The second wiseman then presented his advices; he had written: "Always refrain from overeating, for this weakens a

man; and refrain also from excessive sexual activity, for this likewise weakens him. Let yourself not be deceived by this fleeting world, for in it you will find no loyalty. Try to please the people you rule and condone not the cruelty of tyrants, for if you keep friendship with them, you too will be counted among them. Do not transgress the law of Allah and teach your heart to be humble; for the humble of heart is beloved by man and God. There are four things useful to a king: to adhere to the straight path of religion, to take for viziers men of experience, to have courage in battle, and to rule with justice. And there are four things which ruin a king: the cruelty and injustice of the king, the folly of his advisors, the treachery of his scribes, and the curses of the poor, for Allah has granted their prayers acceptance in the Divine Presence."

"Before you make war on a people, offer them peace, for it is better. When you are preparing to invade a country send out your spies to scout it out, even if you think you know the land. And when you go to battle, exhort your soldiers to stand firm and be patient, for after patience Allah will grant you victory."

117 – FURTHER TRAVELS AND DISCUSSIONS WITH WISE MEN

AFTER RECEIVING his wisemen's counsels, Iskandar departed for the land of the king Shamah. He subdued him and remained there as a guest for a month. One day he said to the king, "Who are your enemies?" Shamah answered, "The people of Kapchak are our enemies and they hold a fortress called Gulshahi. From there they fall upon and raid our land." Iskandar said, "I will take their fortress and rid you of this trouble." Iskandar and his men began to besiege the fortress, but they could not take it, and they remained there for forty days without success. The princes grew tired of this fruitless endeavour and wanted to give up, but Iskandar asked them, "Is there any hermit or holy man living in these parts? If so, show me to him!" For this was his custom, he always enquired after the hermits and anchorites in

any country he came to, although this annoyed the noblemen who vied for his attention. "Yes," they answered him, "there is such a man in our country. He lives in a cave, eats nothing but roots and herbs, and clothes himself in a rough woollen garment. He will accept no gifts from any man, saying his provision comes to him from his Lord." They directed Iskandar to the cave of this hermit, and when he stood at the mouth of the cave, the hermit rose to meet him, saying, "Welcome to you, O King Iskandar!" "How do you know who I am and what is my name?" asked Iskandar in surprise. "I know, for I see with the eyes of my heart," answered the hermit. "Why is it that you have chosen to live here, far away from all human company?" Iskandar asked him. "The world and those who run after it is empty for me, it has nothing to give me, and there is nothing I would wish from it. I have no friends and no enemies in the world, I only have business with the Lord of the Worlds." Then Iskandar said to him, "I have come to you, O holy one, to ask a favour. The Lord has created iron and has made it serve two different purposes: one is the sword which is in our hands, the other is the key which is in yours." "Why do you come to me for help, have you not viziers and ministers enough?" said the hermit. "They cannot help me in this matter, they only try to prevent me from seeking the counsel of the wise." The holy man said, "O King, go now, by tonight you will have attained that which you seek."

Iskandar went back to his camp, and waited. In the early morning he saw a man coming down from the fortress. He came before Iskandar and handed him the keys to the fortress. "Here, Iskandar, take the keys, we surrender to you. This very night a part of the wall crumbled and fell, and we know that it happened by the Will of the Lord and not by your war-machines and catapults. Therefore, we have understood that it is the Divine Plan that you should take over from us, and we abandon all opposition. Vouchsafe to us only safety of our lives and property!" Iskandar promised to comply, and made the inhabitants of Gulshahi promise to desist from robbery and raids from now on. They were then settled in villages nearby, and life

was safer and more peaceful in that country than it had ever been. Iskandar turned and continued along his way.

Whenever Iskandar arrived in a place, he would ask about things strange and singular to that country. In one place he came to there lived a king, by name Seril. This king possessed a magical goblet, about which it was said that only one person could empty its contents in one draught. This person would be the ruler of the whole world. Iskandar stayed as a guest with this king for a while, and he was shown the goblet. Iskandar put the cup to his lips and emptied its contents in one single draught. At the bottom of the cup he found a line of writing so old that no one knew the characters and none could read it. He then passed on to Georgia, Armenia and Caucasia, and was made welcome in every place. But he stayed nowhere for long, for he wished to see the whole world.

118 – KING KĀYD AND THE SAGE BAHRĀM

ONE DAY the king of a certain country whose name was Kāyd saw a series of dreams in his sleep which he could in no way explain. His wisemen knew not how to interpret them for him either, and they said, "No one knows about these matters except the sage Bahrām, but he is not found in the cities of men, he keeps no company but that of the wild deer."

King Kāyd went out to seek the sage. He found him in the wilderness. The king dismounted from his horse and kissed the hand of the sage. Then he proceeded to explain to him his problem. "What were the dreams that you saw?" asked Bahrām the sage. The king said, "In my first dream I saw an elephant coming out of a house by the door, but it was unable to return that way. My second dream was this: I saw a piece of snow-white cloth descend from the sky, and four people held on to each of its four corners; but neither did the cloth tear nor did the four persons stop pulling. In my third dream I saw a monkey with a crown upon his head, seated upon a royal throne. He had a cord tied round his neck, and he would turn wherever

he was pulled by the cord, having no volition of his own. Next I saw a stream of clean, clear water. A man approached the stream in order to drink, but at that very moment a fish swam along and frightened the man so that he ran off without having drunk. Last of all I saw a group of sick people visiting the healthy. What is the significance of my dreams, O Bahrām, if you can tell me?"

Bahrām the sage answered him, "Your first dream signifies Iskandar, the great conqueror, who has come out of the land of Macedonia in order to see the world. It means that he will die in a strange land and will not see his native country again. Your second dream points to the religion of the prophet of the last times which will descend from the heavens like the white sheet of cloth you saw. It will be revealed in Arabia, and all the major religions of those times will try to tear a piece off it, but they will not succeed. Your third dream indicates that you will be succeeded by a weak and powerless ruler who will be swayed by all the influences acting upon him, having no will and direction of his own. As for the stream of water: there will come a time when knowledge and culture will be forgotten and despised; the fish you saw is a man of knowledge who wishes to teach people, but they run from him in fear and ignorance." Finally Bahrām gave king Kāyd this advice, "When Iskandar comes to your realm, do not oppose him, for he is a righteous and rightly guided ruler, give him what he asks and convene with him in friendship." The king promised to act on his counsel and took his leave of the sage. He returned to his city and waited for Iskandar to arrive.

A whole year went by before he had news of Iskandar's approach. At last a letter came from the advancing conqueror, promising his protection and friendship if the king was willing to come to terms, and threatening death and destruction if he was not. Kāyd sent a reply, saying that he was agreeable to everything Iskandar suggested. He wrote him also that he had four especial treasures not found anywhere else in the world. Iskandar sent a team of his foremost counsellors to inspect these treasures and to tell him whether they were truly as won-

derful as king Kāyd had claimed. The envoys were received with great courtesy and honours, and the king showed them his treasures. The first and most precious of these was his own daughter who was the most beautiful maiden of her time. The envoys were dumb-founded when they beheld her and could scarcely believe that she was a human creature, so great was her perfection. The second treasure was a special cup which never ran empty, no matter how many people drank from it, it always filled again of its own accord. The envoys drank and marvelled at the miracle. The third treasure was a physician who needed only to look at a man to know what ailed him, and the fourth was a wise man who knew everything, including the future. All these treasures King Kāyd was willing to give to Iskandar in order to gain his friendship. When the counsellors returned to Iskandar and told him what they had seen, Iskandar sent word that he accepted King Kāyd's gifts, and immediately a great caravan of elephants, trussed with strings of pearls, was prepared to bear the wedding gifts for the princess. These included many chests of gold pieces, priceless jewels and bales of precious cloth, silks and brocades, furs and rugs. That very night the beautiful princess was married to Iskandar according to the rites of the prophet Ibrāhīm عليه السلام.

Iskandar then engaged in discussion with the sage Bahrām. Iskandar sent to Bahrām a cupful of oil, full to the brim. The sage sent it back, having dropped a needle into the oil. Iskandar took the cup and filled the oil into a different container, retrieved the needle and gave it to a smith who made it into a round plate. Bahrām received the plate and polished it until it shone. Iskandar took the plate back and buried it in the ground so that it grew rusty. Bahrām then coated the plate with a substance that prevented it from rusting. After this exchange Iskandar called the wise man into his presence and showing him signs of his pleasure he asked him with a smile for the meaning of these actions. Bahrām replied, "You sent me a cup of oil full to the brim, meaning to say, 'I am busy with the world. My heart is as full with it as this cup is with oil, and nothing else can fit into it!' I dropped a needle into the cup to say, 'No matter

how full your heart may be, there is always room for wisdom.' Then you made the needle into an iron plate, saying 'However much knowledge enters my heart it profits me not, for my heart is like this iron plate.' I then polished the plate until it shone, meaning to say, 'Knowledge and wisdom are like a polish to the heart.' You buried the plate in a damp place and it rusted, and again I polished it, saying, 'You may always improve by following the counsel of the wise.'" Iskandar was very pleased by Bahrām's grasp of his situation, and he wished to reward him, but Bahrām refused all his gifts and said, "I have no need of your riches; what I have, suffices me to lead the simple life of my choosing, and all else would be a burden upon me. Your treasures may remain in the king's treasury, for that is the place where they belong."

Next he called upon the famous physician and asked him, "What is the root cause of all disease?" The physician answered, "There are six major causes: sleeping much during the day and sleeping little at night; drinking a lot of water during the night and eating without being hungry; going about with one's nakedness exposed, and engaging excessively in sexual intercourse. These are the root causes of all the diseases in the world. It is advantageous for men to sleep alone." Iskandar rewarded the doctor for his good advice.

Then he had the marvelous cup filled, and 10,000 men drank from it, yet it never emptied. He asked the sage Bahrām what was the secret of that cup and Bahrām said, "This cup was made by the art of 3000 Indian and Chinese wisemen who understood the science of the stars; it attracts water from the air by a kind of magnetism."

Iskandar was very happy with King Kāyd's gifts, and sent him many presents in return and assured him of his friendship.

119 — THE DEFEAT OF KING FORHIBAL

THERE WAS ANOTHER KINGDOM not far from this land which was ruled by a proud king, Forhibal by name. Iskandar wrote to him also, as he had written to King Kāyd, but this king was proud and belligerent and would not willingly submit to Iskandar. He wrote back that Iskandar would have to wrest the throne from him. The two kings' armies then prepared for war. Forhibal had a column of elephants that he employed in battle. Now Iskandar had never met with fighting elephants before and he asked Bahrām how they should best be met. Bahrām advised him to go against them with fire, for fire is the one thing elephants fear. Iskandar then had a thousand horses made of iron whose bellies he filled with phosphorus. These he fastened to carts and they were pulled onto the battlefield.

But it took time to complete these preparations, and the armies had already engaged in battle seven times before the horses were ready. Forhibal had emerged victorious from every skirmish. When the phosphorous horses were drawn to the field, the elephants took fright and stampeded, and many men were trampled to death, as the animals were out of control. This time Iskandar's men won the day. Iskandar called to King Forhibal to match his strength against his in a duel, and to let that match be their decisive contest. King Forhibal was a great and powerful warrior and many a spear and sword were broken before Iskandar's lance pierced the soft spot under Forhibal's chin and plunged into his throat; so King Forhibal died. When they saw their leader fall, all his men fell into disarray and panic, but Iskandar proclaimed a truce, and let it be known that no one would be persecuted for his loyalty to his king. He paid them their salaries and placed one of the house of King Kāyd over them as vicegerent. Then he departed for other lands.

120 — OF OTHER STRANGE AND MARVELLOUS LANDS

ISKANDAR AND HIS ARMIES reached the borders of India where all the horses perished, for they cannot survive in that climate. He met with the King Hakkan and became his friend. Hakkan and Iskandar spent a month together hunting, then they set out for China. Iskandar learnt the language of every place he went to, and he knew no less than 70 languages, by the grace of the Almighty.

Then he passed on to other parts and came to a desert region where the earth was all red. He went on to the West and came to a desert inhabited only by nomads and the earth there was a shining yellow. Eventually he reached the sea; it was so wide and deep that no one knew how to cross it. People told him that there lived a dreadful beast in those waters whose appearance had frightened many sailors to death. It was also said that there were stones at the bottom of that ocean that caused whomever looked upon them to die of laughter. Iskandar sent down blindfolded divers and ordered them to bring up the stones without looking at them. They brought up the stones, and Iskandar buried them in the yellow earth of that region. In this way he hoped the stones would gradually be ground into dust and carried away by the winds, harmless to men.

He embarked with his men on ships to cross the ocean. Suddenly, out of the waters a mountain arose before them. Iskandar sent out some men in small rowboats to investigate, and as they approached the side of the mountain, a huge gaping hole suddenly opened in it which was then revealed to be the mouth of an enormous fish. It swallowed the men in their boats, then it sank beneath the watersagain, and Iskandar lamented the loss of his companions.

Iskandar travelled on for about six months until he came to the source of a great river. He performed his ablutions there and prayed before setting out again. A great mountain was seen in the distance. "What is behind this mountain?" he asked the

people he met. "It is a mountain, and we do not know what is on the far side, for no one who goes there ever comes back." Iskandar wished to know the secret behind the hill, so he sent a father and his son up that mountain with his instructions. When they had reached the mountaintop, the father glanced over to the other side, wrote a few lines on a piece of paper which he gave to his son, then he threw himself over the cliffs down to the other side. When the son returned to Iskandar, he read the letter which the man had written. It said, "On the other side of this mountain lies paradise, compared to which our own world seems like hell. Therefore, I will go there and not return. But the road leading to paradise is narrower than a hair and sharper than a knife." Iskandar kept this letter and showed it to no one.

Then he came upon a different people and asked them what marvels they knew of in their country. "We know of no marvels," they said, "our lives are quite ordinary. We go out and hunt, cook the meat in the heat of the sun, make clothes from animal skins and drink the rain water that falls every night. That is all we know. But some way ahead, beyond that mountain, there lives a people who thrive on clay and drink bitter water; surely that is a wondrous thing. Beyond them lives yet another tribe who are very fair-skinned, and their lifespan is five hundred years. If they survive that age they live on for another five hundred years until they are a thousand years old. After that they became youthful again, and perhaps they live forever, who can tell?"

Iskandar then travelled to another place, and came to a town where people kept a large jug in every house. They believed that their gods were housed in these big clay pots, for they heard voices coming from them, foretelling events and telling them strange things. Iskandar realised that this was the work of the jinn and fairies, and he taught people the truth about their jugs, and they accepted Islam at his hands. His soldiers then smashed all the jugs, and Iskandar travelled on in peace.

He came to a mountain range which he crossed with the greatest difficulty. Even his horses' hooves were worn down

from exertion. On the far slopes of that mountain they discovered a certain stone that was harder than anything they knew, and they called it diamond. Looking about for more of those stones, they came to a stream. There they saw many diamonds sparkling in the riverbed, but the river was also full of poisonous vipers, so that no one dared to enter the water. Iskandar had some cows slaughtered, and threw the meat into the river. The stones stuck to the pieces of fresh meat and before long, birds dived down to pick the meat out of the water. As they swooped up again with their prey, the diamonds fell on the shore and in this way Iskandar's men were able to collect some of them.

One day, Iskandar had lost his way climbing a mountain. "What is it about this mountain?" he asked. "Behind this mountain," he was told, "there lies a sea. Every night, towards the morning, a sound is heard rising up from this sea which is so terrible that it turns the hair of a young one white and causes pregnant women to abort." Iskandar camped there overnight. Towards the morning he awoke trembling, for the awful sound was heard indeed. Iskandar stopped his ears and asked his counsellor and magician Bilinaz to solve this riddle for him. Bilinaz went in search of the answer and when he had found it, he told Iskandar, "This is a sea of mercury. At daybreak it begins to rise and bubble to the surface, thereby causing this dreadful sound. Have your men beat a large kettle-drum when the sound begins tomorrow morning, and the column of mercury will collapse and the noise will cease." This was done, and the moment the drum was sounded, the terror of the lake subsided. When Iskandar left the region he left the drum behind for the people of that town, and to this very day, the inhabitants of that place are drummers.

Iskandar passed on until he came to a round-topped mountain in which he saw a cave. Entering the cave, he saw a person lying there asleep, his bed surrounded by pearls and precious stones. As soon as he or anyone else reached out his hand to touch one of those stones from desire or greed, he would be struck by something resembling an electric shock, so that he quickly withdrew his hand. As he was leaving the cave, he

thought he heard a voice which said to him, "O Iskandar, you have travelled the whole world round, your time to leave it has now drawn nigh," but no one else had heard this voice. Iskandar passed on and travelled for another month through the vast lands of China. He came to a great plain which was entirely white. He was told that the ground contained pure silver, and he took one hundred camel-loads of it into his caravan and went on. He came to another plain which was bubbling with a multitude of springs. But the water contained mercury and could not be drunk by man or beast, and the place was uninhabited.

121 – THE BANNING OF YA'JŪJ AND MA'JŪJ

FINALLY ISKANDAR CAME to a city by the foot of a mountain. The people of that city ran out to greet him as he entered through the gates, and asked him to help them against their enemies. This story is related in the Sura "The Cave" in the Holy Qur'ān. They told him, "Behind this mountain there live two tribes, Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj, who are descended from Nūḥ's third son, Yāfith. Some of them are short as dwarves while others are tall as giants. They are both enormously strong. Whilst their faces are human, they have the teeth of swine, protruding from their mouths. Their ears are so great they use them for coverlets when they lie down to sleep, and they are covered with hair from head to foot. In the summer they live off snakes and creeping things, but in the winter, when they go hungry they fall upon our houses and devour everything they find. This is a great tribulation for us, and we will do whatever you wish us to do, if you will only assist us against them."

Iskandar then said, "Go, and gather together all the metal you can find!" When the people had brought a huge quantity of iron and other metal, Iskandar constructed a foundry in which all the metal was smelted and cast to form a high dam which spanned the two cliffs, shielding that city from Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj. The fires in the foundry burnt for a whole month

and it took another month for it to cool down. In building the dam, many magic spells and charms were activated by Bilinaz who knew these arts, so that when it was completed, Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj were unable to scale the wall and could do no further mischief.

Now, it is written that one of the Signs of the Coming of the End will be the breaking forth of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj from behind the barrier Iskandar erected between them and the rest of mankind. Until that time many thousands of them will go up to the wall every day and try to lick it away with their tongues, all day long, digging holes into it, for their tongues are hard and tough as drills. In time the wall will become very thin from their licking, as thin as an eggshell. Then, at nightfall, they will leave off their work, and say, "Tomorrow we will break through," but they fail to say *inshā'Allāh*, and so all their labours are in vain. By the morning the wall will have grown back to its original thickness. But when the Last Day has drawn near, it will occur to them one day to say, "Tomorrow, *inshā'Allāh*," and on that day the wall will remain as thin as they have licked it and the next day will see their breakthrough.

By that time they will have multiplied drastically, not one of their men dying before he has sired one thousand children, their women always giving birth to twins. Driven by hunger they will break through the wall and pour forth, drinking up all the rivers and lakes and devouring every-thing in sight. They will wreck and devastate the earth and their terror will fill the hearts of all men. For three years they will be allowed to roam, and their evil will spread as fire. But there are four places they will be prevented from entering: Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem and Shām (or perhaps Sinā'ī). In the end, Isrāfīl ﷺ will blow his trumpet and the Lord will destroy them, and their bodies will be thrown into the sea. Then the Muslims will rejoice.

122 — THE SEARCH FOR THE WATER OF LIFE

ISKANDAR THEN PASSED ON and came to a country of a very cold climate where many of his men died. At last he came to another city where he was made welcome and he was pleased to stay there for a while. One day a man came to him who said, "O Shah (which means King), I have heard that there is a sea and there is a darkness upon it; but whoever is able to cross through this darkness will come to a spring on the far side of the water. This spring is called the 'Water of Life' and whoso drinks of it will live forever and never die.' Iskandar made no reply, but resolved to try to find this spring. He asked Khiḍr ﷺ and Ilyās ﷺ to accompany him, and with them went a company of 4000 young men, none of them older than forty years of age . He forbade anyone older than that to take part in this campaign.

There was, however, one young soldier among these men who had an aged father of 190 years to whom he was very devoted and whom he took with him everywhere he went. He was very unhappy when he heard of Iskandar's orders, but his father said to him, "O my son, put me into a chest and strap me to your mule; in that way I will be with you and nobody will know." His son did just that, and so they set out on the journey. They travelled for one month to the north, and every day they threw the remains of their meals into the sea. One day the old man noticed what they were doing and said to his son, "O my son, it is not good to throw away food, for one day you may be hungry and in need of the scraps you are now discarding. Better throw away only the bones, and keep the crusts of bread here with you in this chest." The son obeyed his father as he always did, and they travelled on for another month. Now they had reached the border of the great darkness. Iskandar called for Ilyās ﷺ and said to him, "I have here two stones which shine with a light of their own. I will take one of them and you take the other; with its help you may find the spring in this darkness or I, and we will let each other know." Then they entered the darkness.

Khiḍr ﷺ went with Ilyās ﷺ, and Iskandar went his separate way. They had been gone for a week. One evening they came to a place where they thought to camp the night and prepared to share the dried fish they had brought with them. Khiḍr ﷺ washed his hands in a stream and took the fish in order to divide it between them. As soon as the first drop of water touched the fish, it came alive and was whole again. Thus Khiḍr ﷺ knew that they must have found the Water of Life. Khiḍr ﷺ drank from it and told Ilyās ﷺ also to drink, and they watered their horses as well. They understood that they had fulfilled their quest and that Iskandar was not destined to reach this stream. Khiḍr ﷺ went out from there and became invisible from that time on.

Iskandar went on his way and came out into the light. He stopped at a mountain on which he espied a great many bird's nests. The birds he saw were great green birds with crimson beaks and feet. They spoke to each other in the Greek tongue and Iskandar understood their speech. The greatest one among them said, "O you ambitious earthling! What are tiring yourself out for! Even if you were to reach the sky, there will come one day on which you surely must die! So why exert yourself any further? That which you seek has been granted to Khiḍr ﷺ and Ilyās ﷺ, and not to you, make no mistake. Turn back and content yourself with your Lord's decree!" Iskandar knew then that he was destined to die, and he sighed.

Then he returned into the dark regions and there he heard a voice. "There are stones here for the picking: but whoever gathers them will be sorry, and whoever does not will be sorry as well!" All of Iskandar's men began to gather the stones but they took only small ones, for they were very heavy, and some men took none at all. Iskandar was given a very small stone as a present by an unknown stranger

who said, "This stone is very small but it is worth more than all the others, for it will tell the truth." At last they emerged from the darkness and the soldiers saw that the stones they had collected were all precious jewels, rubies and emeralds and the like. Those with stones were sorry they had taken only a few

and small ones, and those who had taken none were even more sorry. So the voice in the darkness had spoken truly.

Next Iskandar had his little stone placed in a balance, and weighed, but whatever weights they brought the weight of the stone could not be matched. At that moment Khdir ﷺ appeared and said, "It may be weighed against a handful of earth." It was done and found to be true. Khiḍr ﷺ then said, "O Iskandar, this stone is the symbol of your ambition. It is insatiable and will give you no rest. You will find satisfaction only through the earth, when it covers you." With these words Khiḍr ﷺ disappeared once more.

Iskandar and his men returned to the ships and they travelled for another month: Their provisions ran low on this journey and the men grew very hungry. No one knew what to do. One day the young soldier came to Iskandar and said, "O my king, if you promise me indemnity, I think I can solve our problem." Iskandar asked him what he meant, and the man came back with all the dried bread he had saved up in his chest. They soaked it in water and all the men were fed. By Allah's Endless Bounty there was enough to keep everyone alive for two whole months. Iskandar was more than pleased with the man and said, "We have much to thank you for, as we owe you our lives. Yet I feel that you did not do this from your own wisdom; tell me who advised you to save this bread, and fear no harm." The man grew pale from fear and said, "O my king, I disobeyed your order and took along my aged father on this journey of many months. I hid him in this chest, and it was his whose advice I heeded." Iskandar laughed and set the man at his ease, saying, "Allah forbid I should punish you for saving our lives. Bring your venerable parent to me that I might honour him and the wisdom that age confers on men." He gave them many gifts and tokens of honour.

123 – ISKANDAR'S END

AFTER SAFELY REACHING DRY LAND, Iskandar went to Babylon which he planned to make the capital of his empire. He had not sojourned there for very long when he fell ill after a banquet and died within a few days. He was no older than thirty-three years of age, and had been king for thirteen of these years. When he felt his death approaching, he said, "Let this be my bequest: when I am gone, I wish to be buried with my right hand atop my coffin. Therein should be placed a golden ball. And my left hand shall also be placed on top, its palm facing upwards and empty. This is to say: I have held the whole world in the palm of my hand, yet when I left it, I went empty-handed."

Dhu l-Qarnayn was asked on his deathbed, "Whom do you love more: your father or your teacher?" Iskandar Dhu l-Qarnayn answered, "I love my teacher better; my father is the cause for my having come into this passing world, while my teacher is the reason for my reaching my station in the life of eternity."

May Allah bless him and give peace to his undying soul. Amīn.

124 – SHA'YA عليه السلام (ISAIAH)

IN THE YEARS that followed the death of Alyasa' عليه السلام, Israel grew near ever more corrupted, and for their sinning against Him, Allah sent the Assyrians to vanquish them and to lead them into exile. Judah also saw a succession of evil kings, but one day Ḥizqiyya, the son of Ahaz began to rule in Judah, and he was a just king. He feared Allah and kept His commandments, and Allah sent him Sha'ya عليه السلام the prophet to be his strength and support. The Assyrians came also against Judah and took many of the fortified towns, and besieged Ḥizqiyya at Jerusalem. Sennacherib's commander stood before the gates, mocking Ḥizqiyya's men and making a laughing stock of their faith in the Almighty Lord. "When have any of the gods ever helped a people against the mighty king of Assyria, the great Sennacherib?" he jeered, "Do not trust in what your king Ḥizqiyya tells you and lay down your weapons! You stand no chance against us!" Ḥizqiyya heard these words and called for the prophet Sha'ya عليه السلام who prayed long and fervently. At last he said to Ḥizqiyya, "Fear not, my king, for the Lord has promised to Himself defend the city of Jerusalem, and Sennacherib shall not enter it." That very night the angel of the Lord went about the camp of the Assyrians and slew 185,000 men. In the morning the survivors found the dead, and departed hurriedly and in fear. Upon his return to Niniveh Sennacherib was slain by his own sons while he was worshipping his idol in his temple. Thus Jerusalem was saved.

One day Ḥizqiyya fell ill and felt his life going from him. He called for the prophet and asked him for words of guidance. The prophet prayed and received a revelation. "O my king," he said, "your time has come indeed, so prepare yourself and make your last will, and state who shall be your successor." The king wept on hearing these words and prayed for a long time.

"O my Lord," he cried, "You know what is hidden and what is manifest; You alone will be my judge and You know whether I have been a just king and served my people well." And he wept bitterly. The Lord then spoke again to the prophet Sha'ya ﷺ, and Sha'ya ﷺ returned to the king, saying, "O my king, take heart, for the Lord Almighty has prolonged your life by another fifteen years because of your faithfulness and justice. Order a fig cake to be brought and laid upon your boils, then you will recover." This was done, and Ḥizqiyya was healed of his disease. He then prostrated before the Lord and said,

"*O my Lord, You are the King of Kings, Master of the Kingdom. Thou givest the Kingdom to whom Thou wilt, and seizest the Kingdom from whom Thou wilt; Thou exaltest whom Thou wilt; in Thy hand is the good; Thou art powerful over everything.*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:26]

For the remainder of Ḥizqiyya's reign there was peace in the land of Judah. Sennacherib was succeeded by his son, but he no longer troubled Judah as long as Ḥizqiyya was king.

Sha'ya ﷺ was sent as a preacher to the people and his words were strong and burned with the Truth. He, the Almighty, spoke through him: "O My servants, you enjoy My bounties, yet you obey only your lower nature. If you are ill, you turn to Me for healing, but after you have recovered, again you disobey Me. I alone am the Forgiver of sins. Why then do you deny My Godhood? What good do you see in this world? It is a ruined palace that I, the Lord Almighty, have built up. If I choose to destroy it, who is there to prevent Me? It is I who causes streams and rivers to flow to the surface of the earth, and oceans to gather with unfathomable depths. I cause the trees to grow and manifold fruits to ripen on the fields. Your kings die and their kingdoms crumble, their reign passing away as if it had never been. Nothing has permanence on this earth, and soon I will reclaim your souls. The only lasting support you can find is My Holy Law, and its undying source is My Word. Constancy you will find only with My prophets and My Friends, and in reverence and awe they draw near to Me, and I receive them with My Love."

People would say to Sha'ya ﷺ, "We perform our religious duties, but our hearts are not enlightened; we pray and we fast, but our spirit is not cleansed and our prayers are not accepted." Allah Almighty answered them through His prophet Sha'ya ﷺ: "Tell them, O Sha'ya ﷺ, how shall I accept their lawful fasting when they break it with unlawful things? How shall I accept their prayers while their tongues speak lies and their hearts are in love with other than Me? How shall I accept their charity when they dispense what does not belong to them? And how shall I give ear to their supplications while their words are one thing and their acts are another? When they hear My Word, they say, 'It is no longer valid, it does not apply to us', and when they hear My prophet speak, they say, 'He is repeating only what we have heard of old and what has been spoken before him.' Tell them, O Sha'ya ﷺ, that My pleasure rests on the poor and My might with those they hold contemptible; My strength goes to the weak, and I count as rich the homeless dervish and wanderers in My Way, and knowledge will rest with the unlearned. I will send a prophet to this world who will be unlettered, he will speak no lie and commit no cruelty. His disposition will be generous and honest, and his chief characteristic will be his compassion. He will be kind and just and will order the affairs of men according to the Divine Law which will be revealed in his time. His nation is the nation of Islam and his name will be Aḥmad. He will be sent to mankind after they have lost all guidance and when they are in the darkness of ignorance. Then he will teach them knowledge of the Truth, and I will make their few many, the poor rich, and the humble will become men of power. All the dispersed folk I will gather around him, and they will unite in the Faith. His nation I will make better than any nation before his time, and after him there will be no more prophets until the End of Time."

When his people heard these words from Sha'ya's ﷺ mouth they were enraged and decided to put him to death. Sha'ya ﷺ was forced to flee from them. He ran out into the wilderness and into the mountains. He found a tree and by the Command of Allah the tree-trunk split open and admitted Shay'a ﷺ to

enter into it, then it closed up again and hid him within without crushing him. But the accursed Shayṭān was on his trail and caught a piece of his caftan so that it showed where he had hidden, and his pursuers attacked the tree with axes, until they had felled the tree. Then they chopped and hacked it to pieces, and Sha'ya ﷺ within the trunk died a martyr under their savage blows.

May Allah have Mercy on his beatific Soul.

125 – ARMIYĀ (JEREMIAH), DĀNYĀL, AND ʿUZAYR (EZRA) عليهم السلام

AFTER SHA'YA'S عليه السلام DEATH the word of revelation came to Armiyā and he was sent as a prophet to his people. Armiyā عليه السلام said to Allah Almighty in his prayer, "O my Lord, I am weak, how shall I do Your Will?" The Lord said to him, "The hearts of men are in My Hand. I send to them whatever I wish. Thus I will inspire you and no harm shall come to you." The Lord ordered Armiyā عليه السلام to preach, but he knew not what to say. He obeyed as Allah had commanded him, and when he spoke he was inspired and the Lord taught him all he needed to know. At the end of his sermon he said, "Our God, Almighty Allah, swears by His Might and Glory that if you do not mend your ways, He will send upon His people an affliction as they have never seen before. First a tyrant will come against them with great cruelty and injustice, followed by so great an army that it darkens the earth as a cloud; then this king will wrest the kingdom from Judah and lead all its inhabitants into bondage and exile. The holy temple will be destroyed and Jerusalem laid waste." People heard his words and were angered by the prospect of doom which he foretold, and they took and bound Armiyā عليه السلام and threw him in prison.

But before long, his words came true. Bukhtu n-Nasir (Nebuchadnezzar) of Babylon marched against the kingdom of Judah with a gigantic army of 600,000 men, and Judah fell before his might. The Babylonians slew whomever they found and devastated the land. Jerusalem was sacked, and the temple destroyed. The people were led off into bondage and cried many bitter tears.

Among those led into exile were members of the royal house of Judah and nobility. Bukhtu n-Nasir had some of these youths

singled out and educated especially for his own service. One of these young men was Dānyāl, and as he grew up the Lord gave to him prophetic vision. One day the king Bukhtu n-Nasir had a dream which troubled his mind, but he had forgotten his dream by the time he awoke. So he had all his wisemen and magicians assembled and ordered them to inform him of his dream, and threatened them with death if they could not. But none of them could tell the king what he had dreamt, and Bukhtu n-Nasir in his anger ordered them all to be slain. The order went out all through Babylon, and Dānyāl عليه السلام and his companions heard of it. They too were counted among the learned and the wise, and would have been slain by the order of the king. Dānyāl عليه السلام and his companions prayed to Allah to reveal to them this mystery and to save all the innocent lives that were to be sacrificed, and Allah heard his prayer.

The captain of the king's guard brought Dānyāl عليه السلام before the king and said, "Here is the man who will tell to you your dream. I have found him among the exiles from Judah." Dānyāl عليه السلام then spoke to Bukhtu n-Nasir and told him about his dream. He said, "You have seen a strange thing: it was very great and shone with a dazzling light. Its head was made of gold, its breast of silver, and its legs of copper, up to its groin. Its feet were made of iron, and the toes of clay. Suddenly a stone fell from heaven and hewed this being to pieces which were scattered in the wind. But the stone stood and grew and became as great as a mountain. That, O king, was your dream." Bukhtu n-Nasir then recognized the vision he had seen, and said, "You have spoken the truth, O Dānyāl; but what does my vision signify? If you can inform me of that I will reward you with honour and great riches." Dānyāl عليه السلام said, "You have seen a vision of the times that are yet to come. The kingdoms and affairs of men shall deteriorate and become inferior in time, as silver is inferior to gold, and copper is inferior to silver, until a time comes when iron and clay shall rule, and the lowest point shall be reached. Then the Almighty God will sweep away and destroy all those kingdoms of falsehood and establish His Reign which will stand firm and indestructible as it is the Truth. Allah has made known

to you in your dream what is to be at the end of times, and there is no doubt about this." Nebuchadnezzar was awe-struck at the prophet's words, and gave him many gifts and robes of honour and established him as governor over the provinces of Babylon, out of regard for his wisdom. Dānyāl عليه السلام continued to live at the court of the king, and in this way was able to do much good. He served under Belshazzar who succeeded his father Bukhtu n-Nasir, and after the fall of Babylon he lived at the court of the Persian kings, Darius and Cyrus after him. All his days he was a man of God and never departed from the way of Truth.

May Allah have Mercy on his blessed soul.

After the Babylonian exile had come to an end, the Jews returned to Jerusalem and saw that it had been totally destroyed. 'Uzayr عليه السلام the prophet sat by the remains of the temple and wept both day and night, for many days. Asked why he wept so hard, he would answer, "I weep for the loss of the Holy Torah, the Word of Allah which was given to us, but which we have lost through our unworthiness and neglect." For in the sacking of the temple all the holy scriptures had been burnt and not a single page remained. An unknown stranger came up to 'Uzayr عليه السلام and said to him, "Come with me and do as I say, so that you might recover the Holy Book. Go wash and cleanse yourself and then keep the fast, and tomorrow I will meet you here again." 'Uzayr عليه السلام went and did as the angel — for such he was — bade him do, and returned to the meeting place the very next day. The angle appeared and handed him an earthenware vessel, commanding 'Uzayr عليه السلام to drink from it. 'Uzayr عليه السلام emptied the vessel, and when he had drunk, he wrote down the whole of the Holy Torah from memory, making no mistake. He went, rejoicing to the people and recited the holy text to them, and the rebuilding of the temple was begun.

'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه relates:

When the Babylonian Exile had ended, 'Uzayr عليه السلام returned to the holy land of Judah. He tied his ass to a tree and sat gazing sadly at the devastated land all around him. He saw nothing but waste and destruction and remembered the time when all had been fruitful abundance. He wondered if they would ever

see the blessing of the land restored and its fertility revived. While he was absorbed by these sad reflections, the Lord of the Worlds sent the Angel of Death to seize his soul. 'Uzayr عليه السلام remained however sitting beneath that tree as if in a deep sleep. At long last the Lord awakened him, and 'Uzayr عليه السلام heard a voice asking him how long he thought he had slept. 'Uzayr عليه السلام answered the voice and said, "A day or two, perhaps." The voice spoke again and said, "No, 'Uzayr, you have slept for a full hundred years." 'Uzayr عليه السلام then sat up and looked about him. He searched for his ass, but he saw nothing but a pile of bleached bones. Again 'Uzayr عليه السلام heard the heavenly voice, this time calling to his donkey's bones: "Come together and rise up in your former shape." In an instant the bones moved and locked themselves together to form the skeleton of a donkey, then they clothed themselves with flesh and nerves and blood vessels, and finally skin grew over the shape and the donkey was complete. It shook itself as life entered it and rose to its feet. Then the Lord taught 'Uzayr عليه السلام the whole of the Torah, pouring the words into his heart, and called him to be the prophet of those times. Now, there also stood a jug of milk and a dish of raisins beside him on the ground, and these had not spoilt in all the hundred years that 'Uzayr عليه السلام had slept.

'Uzayr عليه السلام then said to the Lord, Allah Almighty, "O my Lord, it is You who sets the destinies of men and decides on good or evil. Then You bring him whom You cause to commit evil to justice, while it was You who moved him to do it!" The Lord said to 'Uzayr عليه السلام, "O 'Uzayr, if you do not take back that word of yours, I will erase your name from the book of My prophets!" The Lord also said to 'Uzayr عليه السلام, "Regard not any sin as small; look at it as being a disobedience to Me, therefore it is significant, however minor it may seem to you. And if I give only a small portion, regard it not as small, but consider that it was I who gave it and give thanks. If you complain of Me, I will complain of you to My angels, and I will inform them of your disobedience and transgressions, and they will record them."

'Uzayr عليه السلام then looked about him and saw that all the land around him was tilled and had been brought back to life after it

had died. Had he not been shown before his very own eyes and on his own person how the Lord revives the dead? He fell down and prostrated himself before Allah Almighty and gave humble thanks. Then he got up to seek out men so that he might fulfill his prophetic mission. He went first to the place where he remembered his own house to have been. There in the courtyard he met a very old woman who was blind with age. He asked her if this was the house of 'Uzayr عليه السلام, and the woman answered, "What do you know of 'Uzayr?" He answered, "I am he." The woman said, "If that is true and you are still alive after a hundred years have passed, then you must indeed be one of those whose prayers have found acceptance with the Lord of the Worlds. Pray then for my eye-sight to be restored, so that I may see and know you." 'Uzayr عليه السلام prayed to the Lord and the old woman's eyes were given light, and she recognized him, as he had not changed at all in a hundred years. The woman ran out and reported the miracle to her neighbours, and soon news spread all through the village. 'Uzayr's عليه السلام son was still alive, and they brought him, an old man of 120 years, and father and son embraced and praised the Almighty. And so it came to pass that there was a father who was younger than his son.

'Uzayr عليه السلام went out and preached in the land, always accompanied by his donkey. He also took with him a servant who went with him everywhere and who learned much from the constant company of the prophet. A time came when this man grew envious of 'Uzayr عليه السلام and he began to misinterpret his teachings and to instruct people falsely. When 'Uzayr عليه السلام grew aware of this, he drove the servant away and dismissed him from his company.

This man had however already absorbed quite a bit of knowledge and he knew how to make use of it. Straight away he went to the well in Isfahan where the fallen angels Hārūt and Mārūt are tied up and imprisoned every day between *maghrib* and *'ishā'* in punishment. He called down to them in the well and asked to be instructed in the forbidden arts. The penitent angels called back to him, "Leave off these unclean desires, and do not stray from the straight path the prophet you have been serving

has taught you! The knowledge of magic will avail you nothing against the Will of the Lord, and you will take no benefit. It will do you only harm to know what profits you not, and it is forbidden for good reason!" But his lower desirous nature had the man firmly in its grip and he insisted on having his will. Finally the angels told him, "Go to such-and-such a hill, and behind it you will find a lake. You must urinate into this lake; see what happens, and then return to us." The man thought, "This is easy enough," and went to find the lake. When the got there a great fear took hold of him, and he could not do as the angles had told him to do. So he went back to them and lied, saying, "I have done what you told me, but I have seen nothing." "Then you are a liar and have not done as we told you. It is better you do not do it, and forego your desire. Let the matter rest."

But the man was obsessed by the idea, and he went a second time to the lake, but still he could not bear to go near it. He returned, and the next day he went yet a third time. Gathering all his courage, he urinated into the waters of the lake. As he did so, he saw a snow-white bird fly out of his mouth and wing its way towards the heavens. Likewise he saw a pitch-black bird, descend from the skies, and it flew straight into his mouth.

He then returned to the angles in the well and said to them, "Now I have indeed fulfilled your words," and he told them what had transpired. "Ah, woe is thee," said the angels, "for the meaning of this is that faith has left your heart and unbelief has entered it instead. No one may practice the dark arts and call himself a believer. It is a great sin to practise sorcery and it can only be learnt after faith has flown from the heart. Know this well, before you embark on your course."

The man then became an apprentice of sorcery and he learnt to mount a certain vessel and holding a snake in his hand as a whip he would fly up into the skies. From high above he descended on the city of Isfahan and made people believe that he was a prophet. He brought them a book which he had written, and in it he changed all the Divine Laws and made lawful what is forbidden, always and for all times. He took his books and hid it inside of a tree which he forced to open and close

by force of his spells. It was a young sapling of a tree. He told people of the book, and told them also that they would find it in a certain tree which he then described to them. The credulous people went out from the city, found and cut down the tree. Enclosed within it they found the book as he had foretold. They believed this to be a miracle and took it as proof of his being a messenger, divinely guided, and accepted all his false teachings as the truth. In the end he perished, but his influence endured and does so still.

'Uzayr ﷺ meanwhile continued on his way and his wanderings for a while, and when he died he was buried at Jerusalem, where the temple had been rebuilt.

May Allah have mercy on his blessed soul.

126 – THE STORY OF HĀRŪT AND MĀRŪT

WAS MENTIONED BEFORE, in the time of Sayyidinā Sulaymān ﷺ Shayṭān once managed to wrest from him his ring of power and to occupy his throne for a time. The angels spoke to the Lord, "O our Lord Almighty, You have given such powers to man who is weak; being imperfect he cannot wield it correctly so that it produces evil results." The Lord answered them and said, "O My angels, I will teach you something: let those most assured of themselves step forward, and I will give them such a nafs as I have given to man; then We will see how they are able to deal with power." The angels chose from among themselves twelve of the most reverent angels and among these they selected the four most established in piety. Of these four, one angel stepped back, and the other three came before the Lord. "These three candidates are the most steadfast and established in worship," they said. One of the three then felt ashamed before the Lord and said, "O Lord, I have been tempted and I repent; forgive me my trespassing from Thy Boundless Mercy." And he fell down upon his face and has not lifted his head again to this day, but remains in this position imploring the Mercy of the Lord.

Two angels now remained, they were Hārūt and Mārūt. The Lord sent them down into a city of believers; one was to act as a judge there, while the other was to be a scholar. They lived, ate and drank as mortal men during the day, while at night they returned to their heavenly stations by means of the Most Holy Name which had been vouchsafed to them on account of their angelic nature.

Now in that town there lived a most beautiful but mischievous woman by the name of Zahra. She was known for her wiles and her plotting of intrigues, and she did her best to make trouble for everyone. One day she had to appear before the court in a case brought against her so she came before the two angels in court. She contrived to take the judge and the scholar aside to bribe them into deciding the case in her favour. She did this by making sly and lewd promises, concerning the delights she had in store for them, if only they took her side in this one case. Now, as the angels had been given a human nafs, they were vulnerable and corruptible by the wiles of women. This temptress was entrancing, so much so that Hārūt and Mārūt were swayed from the path of justice, forgot their trail and the mission on which they had been sent to earth, and issued a verdict bent in her favour.

The woman Zahra was true to her word, and invited the angels to her house and made a feast for them. She gave them the best of food and drink, and under the influence of wine and music their heads soon became light and reason fled. She then danced for them and teased them, until they were quite mad with desire, and no longer knew what they said or did. This woman Zahra was no fool, and she had long understood that these two 'men' were not as ordinary mortals, and she sought to pry from them their secret. Now that she saw them completely in her hands, she set about to discover what this secret was, and before long she knew the Holy Name which is secret and which the angels used to be transported to their heavenly stations. Zahra was curious to know whether it was true, so she spoke the Name, and as soon as she had pronounced it, she flew off and disappeared from the face of the earth, and was never seen

there again. It is said that she repented of her wrongdoings, and that the Lord of the Worlds forgave her, and set her as a star upon the firmament, known as Zuhra (Venus) which stands in the sky in the early morning or evening.

The angels slowly recovered from their debauchery, and wished to return home to their true stations, but when they tried to read the secret verse they found they could not escape their earthy forms any longer, they were inextricable enmeshed in worldly existence, and the cloak of disobedience was heavy upon them. It was then that realization of what had befallen dawned on them, and they saw how the Lord's Word had come true on them, and that they had fallen. They fell down and wept and prayed and besought the Lord for His forgiveness. At length the Lord spoke to them and said, "You reproached man for his faulty nature; now you have seen that, equipped with a nafs such as his, you will act in no way differently, and all his iniquity has now become yours." Then He Almighty put His angels before the choice of punishment in this life, or in the life hereafter. The angels wept and begged the Lord to give them their punishment in this life, for it is but a passing instant, while the life to come is enduring and eternal. The Lord granted them this wish. Thus it is that they are strung up by their feet in a certain well in the town of Isfahan every day between the hour of *maghrib* and *'ishā'*, and they are punished in this way until the Day of Judgement. Then they will be forgiven and resume their stations among the angels.

The other angels took this episode as a lesson and warning and refrained from tempting the Lord. Never again did they say, "If we were in mankind's place we would do so much better," for they now understood how much is required of man to fight his evil inclination and remain steadfast on the straight path, for he has to live with the nafs the Lord has supplied him with. For this reason also the Lord has given to man even higher rank than to His angels, making man to be His deputy on earth, provided he is able to master his ego.

Hārūt and Mārūt were placed in the well, and would-be students of magic work would flock to them to be instructed.

As it is told in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*And they follow that which the devils falsely related against the kingdom of Sulaymān. Sulaymān disbelieved not! But the devils disbelieved, teaching mankind magic and that which was revealed to the two angels in Babel, Hārūt and Mārūt. Nor did they teach it to anyone till they had said, 'We are only a temptation, therefore disbelieve not (in the guidance of Allah)'. And from these two angels people learn that by which they cause division between man and wife; but they injure thereby no one save by Allah's leave. And they learn that which harmeth them and profiteth them not. And surely they do know that he who trafficketh therein will have no portion in the hereafter; and surely hell is the price for which they sell their souls, if but they knew. And if they had believed and kept from evil, a recompense from Allah would be better, if they only knew.*" [The Cow, 2:102–103]

127 – ZAKARIYYĀ, YAḤYĀ, AND ʿĪSĀ ﷺ

ZAKARIYYĀ ﷺ, PROPHET OF ALLAH AND PRIEST AT THE TEMPLE

THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM was rebuilt and there was peace in the Holy Land for a while. Day and night priests busied themselves with their duties in the temple and scholars in the study houses. Many pious people lived at that time, and a number of them would leave their homes and go to the temple to spend their days fasting and their nights in worship. It was the custom among the Banī Isrā'īl at the time to dedicate their children to the service of the temple, in fulfilment of special vows, or to obtain the favour of the Almighty. These children would be brought to the priests of the temple at the age of five where they were taught and educated from that time on. In that way these children grew up pure, knowing nothing besides life in the temple and none of the corruption of worldliness. It might happen that a person spent his whole life in the temple, and if he died a rich man, he would leave all his worldly goods to the temple as a *waqf*, a pious foundation. According to KA'B AL-AḤBĀR this custom of dedicating their children to temple service dates from the time of Mūsā ﷺ. For the Lord said to Mūsā ﷺ, "O Mūsā, verily the most beloved servant to Me is he who from his earliest youth has never indulged in the darkness of sin." So the Banī Isrā'īl believed that it was a way of obtaining the Lord's special pleasure if they gave their sons to the temple and exempted them from all worldly occupation.

At that time Zakariyyā ﷺ, the son of Berechiah, was among those priests who served day and night at the temple, and he was descended from Sulaymān ﷺ, the son of Dā'ūd ﷺ. He was already of an advanced age when the word of the Lord came

to him and it was made known that he, Zakariyyā ﷺ, was honoured with the rank of prophethood. Zakariyyā ﷺ saw visions and prophesied, and he was a revered and respected elder of the community. Zakariyyā ﷺ had a friend and faithful companion, his kinsman 'Imrān ibn Ma'sān. They had married two sisters, Hannah and Elisabeth, from the line of Harūn ﷺ. Hannah was the wife of 'Imrān and she bore him many sons. Zakariyyā's wife, Elisabeth, however was barren and they had no children until old age overtook them. When Hannah was pregnant once again, she vowed to dedicate the child whom she believed would be another son to the service of the temple. This is told in the Holy Qur'ān in the following verse:

"*When the wife of 'Imrān said, 'Lord, I have vowed to Thee in dedication what is within my womb. Receive Thou this from me, Thou hearest and Thou knowest.'*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:35]

When her child was born it was a little girl, and Hannah knew not how to fulfill her vow, for girls were not accepted in the service of the temple. She prayed to Allah to show her the way and to grant her forgiveness. The Lord answered her prayer and sent a revelation to Zakariyyā ﷺ. He was commanded to give her good tidings and inform her that the Almighty had accepted her child into His service, although she was female. Again this is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*And when she gave birth to her she said, 'Lord, I have given birth to her, a female;' (And God knew very well what she had given birth to; the male is not as the female.) 'And I have named her Maryam and commend her to Thee with her seed, to protect them from the accursed Shayṭān.' Her Lord received the child with gracious Favour, and by His goodness she grew up comely, Zakariyyā taking charge of her.* [The House of 'Imrān, 3:36–37]

Now to have a girl educated within the temple precincts was in those days an unheard-of thing, and when Zakariyyā ﷺ informed his fellow priests of the will of the Almighty, this created a great stir among them. But eventually they accepted the authority of the prophet, and when Maryam was five years old, she was brought by her parents to the temple to live and to study there under the tutelage of the priests. The case was so

exceptional that all the priests now vied for the honour of teaching the little girl and they could reach no agreement. Zakariyyā ﷺ said, "As her relative it is my right and duty to be her instructor, for she is my wife's niece, after all," but even this argument failed to convince them. Finally the angel ordered Zakariyyā ﷺ to have all the priests fetch their pens, with which they used to copy out pages of the Holy Torah, and to each write their name upon his pen, Zakariyyā ﷺ himself included. Then, according to one narration, they covered all the pens with a sheet, and called Maryam to put her hand under the sheet and choose her teacher.

According to another narration, the pens were placed in a bowl of water, and they all sank to the bottom, except for the pen with her teacher's name written upon it. And Allah knows best, as it is written,

"*That is of the tidings of the Unseen, that We reveal to Thee; for thou wast not with them, when they were casting quills which of them should have charge of Mary; thou wast not with them when they were disputing.*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:44]

In one way or another, Maryam was given in her uncle Zakariyyā's ﷺ charge. She was entrusted to his diligence and care and he kept her in a cell in the sanctuary to which he alone had the key, suffering no one else to go near her at all. Maryam learned to pray and to worship and was taught the best of what her uncle Zakariyyā ﷺ knew.

Zakariyyā ﷺ was already an old man of seventy years, and his wife Elisabeth was no younger. All their life they had prayed for offspring, but had remained childless, and when he and his wife had reached advanced age, Zakariyyā ﷺ no longer prayed for a son, for he had no more hope. Instead he gave all his paternal love to Maryam, and devoted himself to her education and upbringing. So it continued until she was about twelve years of age.

One day Zakariyyā ﷺ came to see her in her cell, to bring her food and drink and to give her lessons, as he did every day. It was a winter day, and he found her before a dish of summer fruits, fresh figs and grapes, as the *'ulamā'*, the learned scholars,

assure us. Zakariyyā ﷺ questioned Maryam about these fruits, and she said, "They have been given to me by Allah Almighty." Zakariyyā ﷺ knew that it was a miracle for Maryam, as they were out-of-season fruits, and thus no suspicions entered his heart. Had it been otherwise, he might have believed that someone had succeeded in secretly making a key to Maryam's cell and going to see her in his absence. For some days this miracle persisted; every time Zakariyyā ﷺ went to see her, he found with her a plate of fresh fruits, as it is told in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Whenever Zakariyyā went in to her in the Sanctuary, he found her provisioned. 'Maryam,' he said to her, 'how comes this to thee?' ,From Allah,' she said.*

Truly Allah provisions whomsoever He wills without reckoning." [The House of 'Imrān, 3:37]

After experiencing this miracle for a few days, Zakariyyā ﷺ had an inspiration: If the Almighty could give Maryam fruits of summer in the middle of the winter season, surely He could make it possible for him and his wife to have a child, even though they had both grown old.

"*When Zakariyyā prayed to his Lord, saying, 'Lord, give me of Thy goodness a goodly offspring. Yea, Thou hearest prayer.'*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:38]

128 – THE BIRTH OF YAḤYĀ عليه السلام (JOHN THE BAPTIST)

FOR A LONG TIME Zakariyyā عليه السلام had not prayed to his Lord for a son, having relinquished all hope because of his and his wife's old age. Now he was inspired to pray thus, and the Lord heard his prayer:

"Kāf Hā Yā 'Ayn Ṣād.

The mention of the Lord's Mercy unto His servant Zakariyyā; When he called upon his Lord secretly, saying, 'O My Lord, Behold, the bones within me are feeble and my head is all aflame with hoariness, and in calling on Thee, my Lord, I have never been hitherto unprosperous. And now I fear my kinsfolk after I have gone; and my wife is barren. So give me, from Thee, a kinsman who shall be my inheritor, and the inheritor of the House of Ya'qūb; and make him, my Lord, well-pleasing.'" [Maryam, 19:1–6]

Zakariyyā عليه السلام prayed secretly and told no one of his prayer, for he did not wish to become a laughing-stock before the people. He prayed for an inheritor, not to inherit his worldly goods, but to inherit the prophethood so that it might not die out in the House of Ya'qūb, according to the Lord's promise to Ya'qūb عليه السلام. He prayed for a son who would make Allah well-pleased with him, and who would work to keep his people upon the path of lawfulness and obedience. The Lord heard and accepted Zakariyyā's عليه السلام prayer:

"And the angels called to him, standing in the Sanctuary at worship, 'Lo, Allah gives thee good tidings of Yaḥyā, who shall confirm a Word of Allah, a chief and chaste, a prophet, righteous.'" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:39]

"'O Zakariyyā, We give thee good tidings of a boy, whose name is Yaḥyā. No namesake have We given him aforetime ...'" [Maryam, 19:7]

The angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ came to Zakariyyā ﷺ and informed him that his prayer had been granted and that he would have a son named Yaḥyā. Now the meaning of Yaḥyā is revival, one who comes to life again, and Allah told Zakariyyā ﷺ that no one had been called by this name before. For two old people to have a child is as if something that was dead had come to life again, and that is the meaning of this name. Allah also promised to give him characteristics as no one had ever had before him in such measure; Allah called him a sayyid, meaning someone who would be able to tolerate endless troubles from people and great tribulations. If a person is seeking greatness he must be able to tolerate adversity coming at him from all directions and maintain his steadfast faith at all times. Then Allah spoke of him as *muṣaddiq*, that is, "confirming a Word of Allah," by which is meant that he would be the faithful and credible announcer of the coming of Sayyidinā 'Īsā ﷺ, the prophet to come after him. Allah promised also to make him chaste and extinguished in him all need for women, in so much as all bad things come from evil consort. Zakariyyā ﷺ heard all this and marvelled greatly at the Lord's promise to him, and said over and over again, "O Jibrā'īl, how is it possible! How is this miracle going to happen?" As it is told in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*'Lord,' said Zakariyyā, 'how shall I have a son, seeing I am an old man and my wife is a barren?'*

'Even so', Allah said, 'Allah does what He will.'" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:40]

"*He said, 'O my Lord, how shall I have a son, seeing my wife is barren, and I have attained to the declining of old age?'*

Said He, 'So it shall be; thy Lord says, "Easy is that for Me, seeing that I created thee aforetime, when thou wast nothing."'" [Maryam, 19:8–9]

Allah can cause to happen as He wills, and what He wills can come into being, though we may not comprehend it. Zakariyyā ﷺ then become very glad in his heart, and asked his Lord to send him a sign so that he might know that he had heard and understood truly. The Lord said,

"... *Thy sign is that thou shalt not speak to men, though being without fault, three nights.*" [Maryam, 19:10]

"'*Thy sign,' Allah said, 'is that thou shalt not speak, save by tokens, to men for three days. And mention thy Lord oft, and give glory at evening and dawn.*'" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:41]

As a sign, Allah took from Zakariyyā ﷺ the power of speech, although his tongue and his mind remained whole and healthy. He was only able to communicate through winks and signs of his hands. The Lord commanded him to keep up his worship, *dhikr* and prayer, so Zakariyyā ﷺ was able to form words in his heart, but he was not able to speak to people. Now when he left the sanctuary and went out to his people it was the time for prayer. Zakariyyā ﷺ used to lead the congregation in prayer in the temple; this time he withdrew from the *miḥrāb* and signalled for the congregation to go ahead with the prayer. His people understood that something exceptional must have happened and refrained from questioning him until after the prayer.

"*So he came forth unto his people from the Sanctuary, then he made signal to them, 'Give you glory at dawn and evening.*'" [Maryam, 19:11]

In due course Yaḥyā ﷺ was born, to the indescribable joy of his aged parents. Zakariyyā ﷺ brought him up with great care and lived long enough to see his son reach his calling to prophethood. The Holy Qur'ān says about Yaḥyā ﷺ: "'*O Yaḥyā take the Book forcefully*'" — and there is disagreement among the scholars as to whether Yaḥyā ﷺ received a Scripture in revelation, or whether this refers to the already revealed Torah; "'*and We gave him judgment, yet a little child,*'" — the Lord gave him wisdom and the power of judgment in spite of his extreme youth; "'*and a tenderness from Us, and purity*'" — he was granted a special mercy from the Lord and purified from all passion of the flesh, never knowing a woman. He was kept from mischief and preserved from all sinfulness. "... *and he was god-fearing, and cherishing his parents, not arrogant, rebellious*" — Yaḥyā ﷺ always obeyed his parents, and gave them no trouble as long as they lived. "'*Peace be upon him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive!*'" — Allah praises Yaḥyā ﷺ in

the highest terms and gives him greetings of peace, pointing out as fortuitous the day of his birth, death and resurrection. If the Lord bestows such praise on his mortal soul, what then must be his station in the Divine Presence? [Maryam, 19:12–15].

129 – YAḤYĀ'S ﷺ AUSTERITY

It is related by 'ABDULLĀH IBN 'ABBĀS ﷺ:

One day when Yaḥyā ﷺ was four years old, a group of children called him to come and play with them by the river. He replied, "We are not sent here by our Lord to play!" And he turned away from them.

When Yaḥyā ﷺ was a little older he begged leave of his parents and went to seek the company of pious ascetics and homeless dervishes and learnt their ways. He was of an extremely severe and self-denying disposition, and was given to weeping much. In fact, he wept so much that his tears left marks like grooves upon his cheeks, and their bitterness wore the flesh of his cheeks so thin that his teeth could be seen shining through.

One day Zakariyyā ﷺ was preaching in the temple at Jerusalem. He looked about the audience to see whether his son Yaḥyā ﷺ was among them, for if he knew he was present he would speak about the pleasures of paradise; if he were not there he would speak of the terrors of hell. Yaḥyā ﷺ however was still small and sat among the congregation with his head bowed to his knees, so his father did not spot him. He began to speak about hell. "The Angel Jibrā'īl ﷺ informs me," he began, "that in Hell there is a mountain called Saqrān; on that mountain there is a valley by name Ghadbān (literally: anger, wrath). This is the dwelling place of those who have incurred Divine Wrath. In this valley there are seventy pits of fire; the depth of each measuring 200 years' travel. In each of these pits there are separate compartments of fire, in which the sinners lie chained with fiery shackles." Hearing these words, Yaḥyā ﷺ suddenly let out a cry, "Ah, woe for Saqrān and woe for Ghadbān," and he rose and left the assembly. He wandered off into

the mountains in a disturbed frame of mind, and was nowhere to be found. Worried for his safety, his father and mother went out to look for him, and at length they met a shepherd. "Have you not seen a young man in these parts, who is weeping as if his heart would break?" they asked him. "Yes," answered the shepherd, "I have seen such a young man pass by here. He refuses to eat or drink until he knows whether his place is in heaven or in hell." He directed them towards the way he had gone, and after a while they came across Yaḥyā ﷺ, weeping from fear of Allah. His mother spoke to him first, "By the right of the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck, my son, I bid thee eat of this barley bread and come with us, your parents, this very night." Yaḥyā ﷺ could not refuse obedience to such a request, and he followed them home, weeping still.

When they reached the house, Zakariyyā ﷺ said to his son, "Here, take my robe and warm yourself with it, for you have been out in the cold for a long time." His mother meanwhile prepared a lentil soup, and served it to her son, and he ate. After eating, Yaḥyā ﷺ fell into a deep sleep. He slept so deeply from exhaustion that the morning prayer passed and he had not risen for its observance, nor did

his parents wake him. In the morning he saw a dream. A voice from the unseen called to him, saying, "O Yaḥyā, have you found a house better than My House, and have you found neighbours better than Me? By My Glory and Majesty, I say to you, O Yaḥyā, had you beheld even a glimpse of paradise, your flesh would melt away from yearning for it, and had you but seen hell, your flesh would shrivel and your tears would turn to blood and putrid water from its terror." Yaḥyā ﷺ awoke from his dream with a start, saw that it was morning, and wept so long and bitterly that the angels of all the seven heavens wept with him. Then he said to his parents, "Give me my old woollen cloak, and take back your fine, warm robe, for this is not my place to stay." And he returned to the wilderness where he spent many days weeping.

Shayṭān the Accursed once was asked, "Was there never anything that made you happy?" "Oh, yes," he replied, "once

I was happy: when Yaḥyā failed to rise for the morning prayer, having fallen into deep sleep after eating his fill." "And was there ever anything you were unhappy about?" he was asked. "When I saw the angels of the seven heavens all weeping with him for having missed that prayer, then I became very sorry for not having woken him up myself."

Zakariyyā ﷺ exhorted his son one day and asked him, "O Yaḥyā, my son, why is it that you weep so overly much?" Yaḥyā ﷺ replied, "My father, have I not heard you say that the terrible fires of hell you have described so often are extinguished by nothing but the tears that fall from a believer's eyes? Why then would you prevent me from putting out that fire with my own tears?" Zakariyyā ﷺ was shaken and said, "O my son, you are right. Regarding the fierce and awesome Majesty of the Lord, you have every right to weep, as it is written,

"*Therefore let them laugh little, and weep much, in recompense for what they have been earning.*" [Repentance, 9:82]

As 'Īsā ﷺ was learned in the Torah, Yaḥyā ﷺ took lessons from him. One day 'Īsā ﷺ asked him, "O my friend, you always seem gloomy and depressed; do you then despair of the Mercy or Allah?" Yaḥyā ﷺ answered, "And you, 'Īsā, you are always smiling and seem so full of cheer; do you feel safe from the Wrath and Terror of the Lord?"

Allah then sent a revelation, saying, "My prophet 'Īsā is right, because I have said, 'My Mercy overcomes My Wrath.'"

Yaḥyā's ﷺ tears and castigations reached the Divine Throne, and Allah spoke to him, saying, "I have made hell a prohibited place for you." Yaḥyā's ﷺ heart was then filled with love and hope, and after hearing this news he prayed and worshipped in order to witness Divine Beauty and the Beneficence of the Lord, and thanked Him all his days.

ḤĀRITH AL-ASH'ARĪ ﷺ relates from the Holy Prophet ﷺ:

One day Yaḥyā ﷺ met with the accursed Shayṭān. Yaḥyā ﷺ said to Shayṭān, "Tell me who is your friend and who is your enemy?" Shayṭān said, "My friend is he who, though a believer, is mean and stingy at heart. My enemy is one who is large-hearted and generous, though he may disbelieve." "And

why is that?" asked Yaḥyā ﷺ. "It is because I have hope of deflecting the stingy believer from his belief through the tightness of his heart and his meanness. But the generous unbeliever is my enemy, for despite his evil-doing he possesses an important virtue: that of generosity. This quality may in the end lead him to faith. The stinginess of the believer is enough to make him mine, but the generosity of the unbeliever makes me afraid that one day he will repent of his unbelief and the Lord will accept his repentance and make him His friend. And another thing: If it had been any other than you, Yaḥyā, asking me this question, I would never have given an answer."

130 – THE CONCEPTION OF ʿĪSĀ ﷺ

IT IS RELATED that Maryam lived in a cell in the holy mosque at Jerusalem and that she saw no one except Zakariyyā ﷺ who came to her once a day, bringing her food and drink and teaching her lessons. When she was thirteen she began to have her monthly courses. Her father ʿImrān had already passed away, though some say that he died before she was born. He had a relative, whose young son Yūsuf was orphaned at an early age, and this boy, Maryam's distant cousin, was brought up in the temple as well, but later he was sent out to learn a craft, and he became a carpenter. He worked for a living, and brought all his earnings to the holy mosque and helped in the maintenance and ornamentation of the building. Yūsuf was a pious man, devoted to the service of the temple, and Zakariyyā ﷺ trusted him completely. So much so, that he was the only person to whom he would entrust the key to Maryam's cell when he was called off on urgent business. But this only happened once or twice during the whole time she lived there. Maryam thus knew Yūsuf from sight, but the times he came to her cell, she withdrew behind a curtain, as it is written in the Holy Qur'ān.

"*and she took a veil apart from them ...*" [Maryam, 19:16]

Allah Almighty had decreed to send His prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ to the world through a miraculous birth,

"'... *that We may appoint him a sign unto men and a mercy from Us; it is a thing decreed.*'" [Maryam, 19:21]

One day, as Maryam was sitting by herself, the angel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام appeared to her in her room in the guise of Yūsuf the carpenter whom she knew. As the door was closed and locked, Maryam thought that he had entered her cell by means of stealth, and she was afraid of him.

"*Then We sent unto her Our Spirit that presented himself to her a man without fault. She said, 'I take refuge in the All-Merciful from thee! If thou fearest Allah!'*" [Maryam, 19:17–18]

Jibrā'īl عليه السلام saw that she was afraid and said,

"*I am but a messenger come from thy Lord, to give thee a boy most pure.*" [Maryam, 19:19]

"I have come as a messenger from your Lord," he said to her, "to bestow upon you a pure son, sired not from the loins of a mortal father, nor created from a clot of blood, — no, he will be created directly from the life-giving breath of your Lord." When she heard these words from him, she knew he was no mortal man and her heart was reassured. Maryam then said to him:

"*How shall I have a son whom no mortal has touched, neither have I been unchaste?*" [Maryam, 19:20]

Jibrā'īl عليه السلام answered, "You speak truly; no man has touched you, lawfully or unlawfully, and yet it is an easy thing for the Lord. He will create this son of yours from His own Power, so as to make him a sign for all the world, and people of all times. Just as Ādam عليه السلام was created without father or mother, your son ʿĪsā عليه السلام will be created without a father, and he will be called after you, the son of Maryam ... The Lord has given this son two names, one is ʿĪsā, the other is al-Masīḥ, so let him be called by these names. This is the Command of the Lord, and whatever He wills must come into being."

As it is stated in the Holy Qur'an:

"*Maryam, Allah gives thee good tidings of a Word from Him whose name is al-Masīḥ, ʿĪsā, son of Maryam; high honoured shall he be in this world and the next, near stationed to Allah.*" [The House of ʿImrān, 3:45]

and it is written:

"*Truly, the likeness of Jesus, in Allah's Sight, is as Ādam's likeness: He created him of dust, then said He unto him, 'Be,' and he was.*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:59]

In this way Jibrā'īl ﷺ described to Maryam how 'Īsā ﷺ was to be born, and he is described as a great and honourable person in the sight of Allah, and a prophet to his people, who would call them to their faith and show them many miracles. The first of these, after his miraculous conception and birth would be that he would speak to them in the cradle. Maryam heard all his words, and she believed him and her heart was set at ease. She knew she was chosen among all womankind, and she submitted to Allah's Will and Command.

"*And when the angels said, 'Maryam, Allah has chosen thee; He has chosen thee above all women.'*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:42]

"*And she who guarded her virginity, so We breathed into her of Our Spirit and appointed her and her son to be a sign unto all beings.*" [The Prophets, 21:91]

She prostrated before the Lord and gave thanks, and Jibrā'īl ﷺ then blew into the cuff of her coat of the Divine Spirit, and at that moment she conceived and was pregnant.

Now, the Jews say many things against 'Īsā ﷺ and his mother Maryam, and they disbelieve in the fact that 'Īsā ﷺ was created by the Power of Allah alone, and not through natural procreation. They slandered her and levelled accusations against her, saying that it was actually Yūsuf the carpenter who had fathered her child, and that he was born as a child of sin. We seek refuge against all such false insinuations; the Holy Qur'ān in its verses vindicates Maryam and confirms the virgin birth of 'Īsā ﷺ. 'Īsā ﷺ was created by the Word of the Lord, as He created the heavens, the earth and the angels when they did not exist afore. He needs no substance for causes to take effect, indeed He is the Creator of Causes. He is the creative Word "Be," and it is.

131 — THE BIRTH OF ʿĪSĀ عليه السلام

ARYAM CARRIED ʿĪSĀ عليه السلام for nine months. When she stood in prayer, she could hear the unborn child in her womb praising Allah Almighty. It is also said, that ʿĪsā عليه السلام was taught the Injīl while he was still in the womb. When the time of ʿĪsā's عليه السلام birth approached, Maryam left her cell, "*And withdrew with him to a distant place. And the birthpangs surprised her by the trunk of the palm-tree.*" [Maryam, 19:22–23]

She came to an old palm-tree which had borne no fruit for a very long time. Its branches were dried up and its leaves were crumbling. She leaned her back against that tree for support, and cried out in her pain and her loneliness,

"*Would that I had died ere this, and become a thing forgotten!*" [Maryam, 19:23]

Suddenly she heard a voice calling to her from below where she stood:

"*But the one that was below her called to her, 'Nay, do not sorrow; see, thy Lord has set below thee a rivulet.'*" [Maryam, 19:24]

Some say it was the voice of Jibrāʾīl عليه السلام calling out to comfort her, and telling her to look beneath her for a small stream, some say that she suddenly heard the sound of running water which comforted her. Allah had caused this stream to sprout there and then, and Maryam drank of the water and washed herself and her child in it. Then the voice spoke again:

"*Shake also to thee the palm-trunk, and there shall come tumbling upon thee dates fresh and ripe. Eat therefore, and drink, and be comforted;*" [Maryam, 19:25–26]

Maryam shook the trunk of the dried-up palm-tree, and by the Mercy of Allah, fresh dates fell from it. She ate and drank and her heart was strengthened. The nature of dates is warm and soft, and a very suitable food for women who have just

given birth. Since Maryam's time it has become the custom to give fresh dates and halwa (a sweet made from sesame seeds) to women in childbed.

Then the angel spoke to her again and said:

"*... and if thou shouldst see any mortal, say, 'I have vowed to the All-Merciful a fast, and today I will not speak to any man.'*" [Maryam, 19:26]

A vow to fast can also mean to withhold oneself from speech, and once intended, it becomes obligatory and is counted as worship and a means of drawing closer to the Divine Presence. As in Islam we know the practice of *i'tikāf*, when a person withdraws into seclusion in the mosque for a time, and refrains from all worldly converse and company, so Maryam was ordered to hold a fast of silence after she had born her child. When she felt sufficiently strengthened by the water and the dates which the Lord of the Worlds had provided her with, she picked up her baby and took him to the Temple. As the story is told in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*Then she brought the child to her folk carrying him; and they said, 'Maryam, thou hast surely committed a monstrous thing! Sister of Hārūn, thy father was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother unchaste.'*" [Maryam, 19:27–28]

When Maryam brought the child to the temple, everyone was astounded and all the priests and teachers of the Temple gathered around her and expressed their misgivings and disapproval. For what else should they have thought but that Zakariyyā ﷺ had neglected his duties towards his charge, and that someone had eluded his watchfulness, or worse, that he himself had sired the child. Zakariyyā ﷺ denied this, but they disputed with him, saying, "But a child is born, is that not proof enough?" and tempers were rising. They said to her, "Your father and mother were both honourable people and today you present us with proof of your vile transgression — where did you learn these ways?"

Regarding the expression "sister of Hārūn" the commentators explain: Hārūn ﷺ was the brother of Musa ﷺ. Maryam is to be considered a descendent from Hārūn. In as much as

a woman is described by her kinship as a member of a certain clan or tribe, she can be called "sister" of one of the sons of that tribe. Here the name of Hārūn is called on to indicate a person of piety and integrity who commits no gross sin, and whose attribute is righteousness.

Maryam gave no answer, but pointed only to the baby in her arms, telling them to ask him. They said, !You presume to make fun of us, how should a new-born baby talk to us from his cradle?"

"*Maryam pointed to the child then; but they said, 'How shall we speak to one who is still in the cradle, a little child?'*" [Maryam, 19:29]

Allah Almighty then gave to ʿĪsā عليه السلام the power of speech, and he spoke to them, thus giving them answer and a sign of who he was, and it was his first miracle, He cleared his mother, Zakariyyā عليه السلام and Yusuf the carpenter of all suspicion, and he said,

"*'Lo, I am Allah's servant; Allah has given me the Book, and made me a Prophet. Blessed He has made me, wherever I may be; and He has enjoined me to pray, and to give the alms, so long as I live, and likewise to cherish my mother; He has not made me arrogant, unprosperous. Peace be upon me, the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive!'*" [Maryam, 19:30–33]

The later Christians denied the truth of this verse: that ʿĪsā عليه السلام was a servant of Allah, and that he was given the Injīl, the Scripture revealed to him while he was yet in his mother's womb. "He made me a Prophet," says ʿĪsā عليه السلام, "and blessed is every place I dwell in and shall tread upon. He who learns from me, learns the right way, and he who follows me, follows the right way. And it is He who taught me the rites of prayer and alms giving and enjoined me to continue in their practice as long as I remain on this earth. And he has made my mother free of blame, and made me obedient, not of the rebellious. And Peace be upon me from Allah, the day I am born and the day I die and the day I am resurrected!"

"*That is ʿĪsā عليه السلام, son of Maryam, in word of truth, concerning which they are doubting. It is not for Allah to take a son unto Him. Glory be to Him! When He decrees a thing, He but says to it 'Be,' and it is.*" [Maryam, 19:34–35]

Our Holy Prophet ﷺ relates:

No child is born of an earthly mother but that Shayṭān the Accursed attacks it at birth. Even when ʿĪsā ﷺ was born Iblīs said to a gathering of all the Jinn, "A child is born of a virgin, and he has no father. He is created to be a prophet and is highly honoured in the Sight of Allah. No good will come to us from the child." "What shall we do about it?" asked the Jinn. "We will lead people to fall into disputes about him, they shall fight and kill each other over him, and thus all shall become deserving of Hell."

It is related that the very hour that ʿĪsā ﷺ was born, all the idols fell down from their pedestals, crashing on their faces. All the Jinn and devils gathered around their chief Iblīs (may he be cursed!), and worried, "There must be a reason for this extraordinary happening — what could it be?" Iblīs went out himself and scoured the earth for three days to find the cause. He found out about the miracle birth of ʿĪsā ﷺ that had toppled all the idols, and he plotted on harming ʿĪsā ﷺ in some way. But the angels gathered about Maryam and her son and prevented him from touching them, in answer to the prayer which Maryam's mother had spoken when she was born:

"*And I have named her Maryam, and commend her to Thee with her seed, to protect them from the accursed Shayṭān.*" [The House of ʿImrān, 3:36]

132 — STORY OF THE FLIGHT OF MARYAM AND ʿĪSĀ ﷺ

THE ʿULAMĀʾ (SCHOLARS) SAY that there was never a prophet deserving of this honour who was not exiled from his country for some time, and who had to flee from his people fearing for his life. Ibrāhīm ﷺ fled to Shām after having been rescued from the fires of Nimrūd, Mūsā ﷺ fled to Madyan from fear of Pharaoh, and our Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ fled from Mecca to Medina. This fleeing one's homeland from fear of religious persecution we call *hijra*, migration.

At the time of ʿĪsā's عليه السلام birth, Jerusalem was in the hands of the Romans and Herod was the Jewish King over Shām and the adjoining regions. One day three noblemen came in from the East, presented themselves at Herod's court and asked Herod what he knew about the miracle child who had been born without father. They were learned in astrology and had studied the charts and had realized that a sign of Allah's Power was about to be revealed around that time in that land. Some say that they were led to ʿĪsā's عليه السلام birthplace by a star, a comet, perhaps, which they followed, others say that the king of Persia knew about the coming of ʿĪsā عليه السلام from the Book of Dānyāl عليه السلام, and that he had sent his wisemen there to find out about him. When they came to King Herod, he questioned them and heard that they had come, bearing gifts for "the child born without father," whom they intended to honour and pay their respects to. "What are these gifts you have brought?" Herod asked them. "We have come with three things," they answered, "one is a lump of gold; the other is a piece of aloes, and the third is incense." "What is their use and meaning?" Herod asked further. "Gold," they replied, "is the lord of all precious things, and it signifies that this child is chosen to be the best of all created beings of our time. Aloes is a substance which heals what is rent or broken; it is to signify that this boy through his prayer and devotions will heal the rifts among mankind; and frankincense, when laid upon glowing charcoal exudes a fragrance which rises up to heaven. So, it is foretold, this child will later be taken up to the heavens on Command of the Lord."

Herod listened to their words, and in his heart he was troubled by jealousy of this miracle child, and worried that he might become dangerous to him when he grew up and diminish his own glory. So he made a plan in his heart to seek out ʿĪsā عليه السلام and to kill him. But he said nothing of this to the three wisemen; he told them only, "Go and find this holy child, and when you have seen him, come back to me and report where he may be, so that I too might visit him." The wisemen departed, led on by the star, but after they had found ʿĪsā عليه السلام and his mother and

delivered their gifts and their blessings, they were warned by a misgiving in their hearts, and returned not to Herod, but left the land by a different way than they had come.

Herod, finding himself betrayed by the wisemen, was very angry, and resorted to violence. He ordered that all young male children born around that time in Judah be slaughtered, hoping to rid himself of any danger of a rival in this beastly way. Maryam was however forewarned of this move, and by night she and Yūsuf the carpenter set out with an ass and secretly made their way towards Egypt. They went with nothing, for they were very poor. But the Lord led them to a good place of fruitful abundance, and they settled there as unknown strangers. They remained there until ʿĪsā ﷺ was a lad of twelve, then they returned to Jerusalem.

"*And We made Maryam's son, and his mother, to be a sign, and gave them refuge upon a height, where was a hollow and a spring.*" [The Believers, 23:50]

Allah Almighty led ʿĪsā ﷺ and his mother to a place of safety, where they found rest and received a good welcome.

The headman of the village they had come to, was a good man who loved to welcome strangers and extend his help to the poor and wayfaring and he kept his guesthouse open to all. One day, when ʿĪsā ﷺ was still quite a small boy, there was a burglary in this headman's house. During the night when all were asleep, thieves had entered the house and had emptied out all there was in his storehouse and treasury. In the morning it was discovered, and there was a great outcry and lament. The whole of his household came together to deplore the loss among them also Maryam and her son ʿĪsā ﷺ. Maryam, wept with the other women, saying, "This generous house on account of which we have been living in comfort and happiness has been robbed most completely, what a shame!" ʿĪsā ﷺ then said, "Do not weep, my mother, I will find out the thieves and bring back all they have taken." Everyone who heard him, including the headman, was surprised, for ʿĪsā ﷺ was not even ten years old. But they were happy for anybody's help just then. ʿĪsā ﷺ then asked, "How many people slept last night in

your guesthouse?" "Only two," answered the headman, "and one of them was lame, the other blind. They cannot possibly have performed such a perfect burglary!" "Go and fetch them all the same," said ʿĪsā عليه السلام, and the two men were brought before him.

ʿĪsā عليه السلام then spoke to the lame man, "Go, mount upon the back of your blind companion!" Then he said to the blind man, "Now get up!" The blind man began to whine, saying, "But I am too weak, I cannot carry him!" ʿĪsā عليه السلام replied, "But last night you were perfectly capable of doing so. Get up!" Then he brought some rope, tied it around the blind man's waist, while the lame man, mounted upon the blind man's back, was able to reach the window. From that upstairs room there was a small opening into the storeroom of the house, and using the rope, the lame man led the blind one in and pulled him up again, many times, until they had emptied the room of its treasures entirely. ʿĪsā عليه السلام had discovered their secret, and they could not deny it. They both confessed and brought everything they had stolen back to the headman's house. He was very glad, and said to Maryam, "You and your son are indeed blessed people; do me the honour and stay with me, I will look after all your needs and pay for the upkeep and education of your son." So they stayed with him yet another while.

ʿĪsā عليه السلام manifested yet another sign during his time in Egypt. The headman one day prepared a great wedding feast to which he expected many honoured guests to come. He filled every jug and vessel he had in the house with wine, for at that time the drinking of wine was *ḥalāl* and permissible. The feast began and it went on for days, as was the custom; the guests were all very merry, and the wine flowed freely, and at last it ran out, and there was no more to be found anywhere in the village. The headman wrung his hands, for he wished not to be shamed before his guests, and to make matters worse, just at that moment even more good friends of his arrived, and had to be welcomed with a toast. The headman was debating what to do, when ʿĪsā عليه السلام came up to him, and said, "Do not worry; go and fill all your vessels and jugs with water!" The

headman looked at him doubtfully, but did as he said anyway. Then ʿĪsā ﷺ passed his hand over the mouth of the jars and jugs, and when they tasted the contents, the water was seen to have turned into wine, better than any drop that had ever been tasted in that village.

133 – HOW ZAKARIYYĀ ﷺ WAS MARTYRED AND THE PROPHETHOOD OF YAḤYĀ ﷺ

When ʿĪsā ﷺ and his mother Maryam had fled to Egypt in secret, the Banī Isrā'īl were roused against Zakariyyā ﷺ, repeating their accusations and slandering his name. "We thought of you as a righteous man and a prophet," they said, "but now we have seen you commit shameful deeds, carrying on unlawful relations with the girl placed in your charge. She is now nowhere to be found, perhaps you have even done away with her and her son. You deserve to be punished by death for your crime ..." They came before Herod and repeated their allegations before his court. "According to our law," they said, "such a person must be put to death." Herod remembered what he had heard about the miracle child, and learning how that this child which he feared had been taken away and had thus escaped from his soldiers, he gave permission to the Jews to carry out their sentence.

Zakariyyā ﷺ left Jerusalem and fled towards Shām, hoping to find ʿĪsā ﷺ and his mother Maryam there and to join them. He was pursued by the Banī Isrā'īl and he soon saw that they would overtake him. A great tree grew outside the city gate, and Zakariyyā ﷺ hid within its hollow trunk. The pursuing party came up and could find no trace of Zakariyyā ﷺ, so they sat down in the shade of that tree to think over the situation. Iblīs, the accursed Shayṭān, then came up to them and said, "Zakariyyā has hidden within this tree, you must cut it down, and you will find him. If he is within it, it will become evident, if he is not, then what harm will you have incurred?" "You are right," said the pursuers, and attacked the tree with their axes.

Before long they saw blood flowing from the tree, and they realized that he had been right, indeed.

Some sources say, that Zakariyyā عليه السلام said to the tree, "Open up!" and the tree, by the grace of God, opened up to hide Zakariyyā عليه السلام within it and then closed up again. But Shayṭān took hold of his robe, and let a corner of it remain without it, visible to the pursuers. But this is not correct for He who hid Zakariyyā عليه السلام in the tree was Allah Almighty, and if he can hide the man, He is also powerful to hide his cloak.

Another narrator says, that it was Sha'ya عليه السلام who died in the tree (as has been related), and that Zakariyyā عليه السلام died in his bed. It is also related: When the axe touched Zakariyyā عليه السلام in the tree-trunk, he cried out in pain. The Almighty then addressed him, saying, "O My prophet, had you sought refuge with Me, I would have saved you; but since you sought the help of the tree, if you cry out once more, I shall erase your name from the book of Prophets ..." Zakariyyā عليه السلام then uttered not another sound as they chopped down the tree, and so met his death, a martyr.

Peace be upon his blessed soul.

Yaḥyā عليه السلام meanwhile hid in the city. Time passed, and Yaḥyā عليه السلام received the call to prophethood. He preached and taught for thirty years, and gave news of the coming of ʿĪsā عليه السلام the Masīḥ. Yaḥyā عليه السلام was the first to believe in ʿĪsā عليه السلام when he returned from Egypt, therefore Allah Almighty says of him,

"*Lo, Allah gives thee good tidings of Yaḥyā Who shall confirm a Word of Allah ...*" [House of ʿImrān, 3:39]

This *kalīma*, the "Word of Allah" is ʿĪsā عليه السلام on whom be peace. ʿĪsā عليه السلام was Yaḥyā's عليه السلام second cousin, and the inheritor of his prophetic mantel.

134 — THE STORY OF ʿĪSĀ'S عليه السلام PROPHETHOOD

ʿĪsā عليه السلام GREW UP and returned to Jerusalem where he sat and taught in the mosque. His prophethood was revealed and he expounded from the Injīl, the Scripture given to him while he was

still in his mother's womb. He came to his people with many signs and miracles. One of these is told in the Holy Qur'ān. The Banī Isrā'īl demanded that he prove his prophethood by means of a miracle, and 'Īsā ﷺ said,

"*I will create for you out of clay as the likeness of a bird: then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird, by the leave of Allah.*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:49]

"All right," said the Banī Isrā'īl, "we shall see what happens." And 'Īsā ﷺ fashioned for them a bird from clay, and blew on it; by the Grace of Allah Almighty, it came alive and flew away. The *'ulamā'* say that it was a bat which he made, therefore the bat is such a strange animal, that flies only by night, and has no real wings but only skin stretched over bones. It is not a bird, for it bears its young alive, and is a mammal; besides it has nearly human features and laughs like a human, and its female also shows blood like a woman. 'Īsā ﷺ created it with the Breath of Life which he blew into the shape: 'Īsā ﷺ blew, and Allah created, just as 'Īsā ﷺ himself had been created when Jibrā'īl ﷺ blew onto his mother Maryam.

The Banī Isrā'īl looked on and were amazed, but they demanded to see more. "Have you no other miracles to show us?" they said.

"*I will also heal the blind and the leper ...*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:49]

said 'Īsā ﷺ. There are many kinds of blindness and some of them can be cured. But there is no way to cure a person who has been blind from birth and whose eyes are not properly formed. Such a healing can only be a miracle given to a true prophet. 'Īsā ﷺ healed also the lepers, outcasts suffering from a terrible, incurable disease. And still people said, "Have you no other miracle?"

"(*I will*) ... *bring to life the dead, by the leave of Allah.*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:49]

said 'Īsā ﷺ. "By the Command of Allah Almighty I will cause the dead to rise. Find and choose a person who has died a long time ago, and I will call him back to life." The Banī Isrā'īl discussed the matter at length amongst themselves, and

they finally announced their decision. "Bring to us Sām, the son of our father Nūḥ عليه السلام whose grave lies in a valley close to Jerusalem." Sām is the father of the Semitic people, Nūḥ عليه السلام is his father; Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, Isḥāq عليه السلام and Yaʿqūb عليه السلام are his descendants. ʿĪsā عليه السلام went to the grave and stood aside at one corner, raised his hands to heaven and called out: "O Sām, son of Nūḥ, arise, by the leave of Allah!" The earth trembled and split apart, and a figure rose from the grave, shaking the crumbling dust from his hair and beard. ʿĪsā عليه السلام spoke to the man and said, "Who are you?" "I am Sām, the son of Nūḥ," replied the man. "And can you tell me who I am?" asked ʿĪsā عليه السلام. "You are ʿĪsā, the Prophet of the Lord," said Sām. ʿĪsā عليه السلام then said, "How is that your beard has turned white when it was not so at the time of your death?" Sām answered, "You are right, o my prophet, when I died both my hair and beard were black. But now when I heard your call 'Arise!', I thought it was the trumpet of Isrāfīl, heralding the Day of Judgment, and from fear and awe of that day both my hair and beard turned white of an instant." ʿĪsā عليه السلام then said, "O Sām, if it is your wish, I will pray to the Lord to prolong your days so that you may walk upon the earth again ..." Sām answered "O prophet of my Lord, of what use could that be to me? For even if I lived for many hundreds of years, in the end I must die; I still feel the pangs of death in my veins from the death I have already known, and whoever has tasted death once does not long to repeat that experience. Better you leave me where I was, and I will wait there for my Lord's Judgment on the Last Day ..." ʿĪsā عليه السلام then prayed again, and Sām disappeared in his grave. The earth closed over him and all was it had been before, as if nothing had been disturbed.

Even after this amazing apparition the Banī Isrā'īl asked, "Have you no other miracles?" ʿĪsā عليه السلام answered,

"*I will inform you too of what things you eat, and what you treasure up in your houses. Surely in that is a sign for you, if you are believers.*" [The House of ʿImrān, 3:49]

He looked at one person and told him, "'"Last night you ate a meal consisting of such-and-such foods, and you ate just so

much of it and put the rest away in your pantry." And it was the truth. So he told many of them about what things they had hidden in their houses, facts he could not possibly know if the Lord had not informed him through his prophetic senses.

Then 'Īsā ﷺ said to the Banī Isrā'īl, "I have been sent to you by the Lord to teach you from the Torah as you know it, but also I have been sent to you with a new Scripture, the Injīl, in which your Lord eases for you certain restrictions of the Law of Mūsā ﷺ."

"... *confirming the truth of the Torah that is before me, and to make lawful to you certain things that were before forbidden to you.*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:50]

One of the things forbidden to the Jews was the suet of the animals they ate. This was made lawful to them in the time of 'Īsā ﷺ, but they did not accept this, for they rejected 'Īsā ﷺ and disbelieved in his prophethood. "You are no prophet," they said, "you are but a sorcerer and magician ..." 'Īsā ﷺ spent ten years teaching among his people, but very few of them would believe. Yet, there were twelve men who became his devoted disciples, and they are referred to in the Holy Qur'ān as the Ḥawāriyyūn which comes from an Arabic word denoting the colour white. It is related that one day 'Īsā ﷺ came by a group of bleachers, and after preaching to them, he said, "What is your profession?" They said, "We are bleachers." 'Īsā ﷺ then said, "Come with me and follow my way, and I will teach you to bleach your souls, making them white and pure from sin."

Ka'b al-Aḥbār relates: "The Ḥawāriyyūn were bleachers, fullers, who bleached white linen. The word Ḥawāriyyūn comes from an Arabic root meaning "to bleach, to make white." When 'Īsā ﷺ called them to his way, they too demanded a miracle. 'Īsā ﷺ put a handful of spun thread in a pot full of black dye and when he pulled them out, they were seen to be each a different colour. Then the Ḥawāriyyūn believed and went with 'Īsā ﷺ wherever he led them.

As it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*And when 'Īsā perceived their unbelief, he said, 'Who will be my helpers unto Allah?' The Ḥawāriyyūn said, 'We will be helpers of Al-*

lah; we believe in Allah; witness thou our submission. Lord, we believe in that Thou hast sent down, and we follow the messenger. Inscribe us therefore with those who bear witness.'" [The House of ʿImrān, 3:52–53]

And:

„O believers, be you Allah's helpers, as ʿĪsā, son of Maryam, said to the Ḥawāriyyūn, 'Who will be my helpers unto Allah?' The Ḥawāriyyūn said, 'We will be helpers of Allah.'

And a party of the Banī Isrā'īl believed, and a party disbelieved." [The Ranks, 61:14]

These twelve Ḥawāriyyūn followed ʿĪsā عليه السلام and he travelled with them through all the towns and villages of Israel and Judah.

ʿABDULLĀH IBN ʿABBĀS reports: "There was never a prophet completed his mission until he had not given tidings of the coming of the prophet of the Last Times, Sayyidinā Muḥammad ﷺ. Every prophet swore his allegiance to him who would come to confirm all those who had gone before him."

As it is written:

"And when 'Īsā, son of Maryam, said, 'Banī Isrā'īl, I am indeed the Messenger of Allah to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad.' Then, when he brought them the clear signs, they said, 'This is a manifest sorcery.'" [The Ranks, 61:6]

It is related from KAʿB AL-AḤBĀR: The Ḥawāriyyūn asked ʿĪsā عليه السلام, "O Ruḥallāh — meaning Spirit or Breath of Allah, another name for ʿĪsā عليه السلام — will there come a nation after ours?" ʿĪsā عليه السلام replied, "Yes. The nation of Aḥmad ﷺ is yet to come. They will be pious and pure and learned in religious knowledge; each one of them will be as a prophet in knowledge. Their prophet will be called Aḥmad ﷺ for that he praises Allah much; all other prophets may be praiseworthy, but none so much as Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ who glorified Allah more than any other. Therefore he is given this name: Aḥmad."

135 – THE STORY OF THE HEAVENLY TABLE

MUḤAMMAD IBN JARĪR relates in his comprehensive account of the life of ʿĪsā ﷺ, son of Maryam the story of the Heavenly Table, which is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān.

When ʿĪsā ﷺ and his disciples travelled through the lands of Israel, a great many people used to follow him around, some of them from true belief, others from desire to witness strange spectacular occurrences and to be entertained. One day, in a southern village named Balbays they came to rest, and there was not much food there to feed the throng of people. People came to the Ḥawāriyyūn and asked them to tell ʿĪsā ﷺ that they were hungry, and would he not pray for a table to be sent down to them from heaven, so they could satisfy their hunger. Also they would know by this sign that ʿĪsā's ﷺ claim of propheth-ood was real. The Ḥawāriyyūn came with this message to ʿĪsā, ﷺ and said,

"*'O ʿĪsā, son of Maryam, is thy Lord able to send down on us a Table out of heaven?'*" [The Table, 5:112]

and ʿĪsā ﷺ answered, "Fear ye Allah, if you are believers." ʿĪsā ﷺ was warning them not to tempt the Lord, but to believe in purity of spirit. The Ḥawāriyyūn replied,

"*We desire that we should eat of it and our hearts be at rest; and that we may know that thou hast spoken true to us, and that we may be among its witnesses.*" [The Table, 5:113]

"Yes, we do believe," they said, "but we should like to see this miracle so that our hearts might be satisfied, and we may have the certainty that you are a true prophet and we may know your rank and that of those who follow you."

ʿĪsā ﷺ then raised his hands to heaven and prayed:

"*O Allah, our Lord, send down upon us a Table out of heaven, that shall be for us a festival, the first of us and the last of us, and a sign from Thee. And provide for us: Thou art the best of providers.*" [The Table, 5:114]

A table here means a table spread, laid out with food, set for a meal. Allah answered ʿĪsā ﷺ in a revelation:

"*'Verily I do send it down on you; whoso of you hereafter disbelievers, verily I shall chastise him with a chastisement wherewith I chastise no other being.'*" [The Table, 5:115]

Now ʿĪsā عليه السلام informed the Ḥawāriyyūn of what the Lord had spoken, and some say that they forewent their desire from fear of the threatened chastisement and because they wished no one to come to grief. But as the story of the Table is told in the Holy Qur'ān, it must be the truth. The Ḥawāriyyūn went and told the people that Allah would cause this miracle to happen, but they told also of the severe punishment that would befall those who ate of the heavenly food and yet disbelieved. But people accepted all conditions and said, "It is enough for us to see whether he can make this happen ..."

The next day ʿĪsā عليه السلام raised his hands to heaven and prayed before the assembled crowd. All heads were turned towards the sky, and they presently beheld something descending towards them, as if between two layers of clouds. These were angels bearing the table, but they could not see their real forms. At last it was seen to be a table, but it was covered by a cloud-like cover, or a cloth. ʿĪsā عليه السلام stretched out his hand to uncover it, but then he was ashamed before the Almighty and turned to the people, saying, "I am ashamed before my Lord to have tempted Him; do you remove this cover." But people were hesitant and afraid, and said, "No, it is for you to uncover it, you are a prophet, not we."

When the table was uncovered they saw on it a number of plates. On one plate was a large fried fish, on another some white salt, and there were five loaves of bread. There were also a number of garden greens, and small plates with butter, honey, cream, cheese and olives. The people sat down to eat, everyone in his turn, and even though there seemed not to be much food on the table, everyone was filled. The feeding of the masses continued until sundown, then the table suddenly rose and floated back towards the heavens. The next day in the morning, it came again, and the feast continued. For three days the miracle continued, on the fourth day the table came no more. All who had partaken of the heavenly food, benefitted in some way: the sick were healed, the feeble were strengthened, those

of unsound mind regained their sanity, and the poor people's lot improved, while the rich, as always, got richer.

Some say, that the unbelievers continued to doubt even after the table had come down from the heavens, and the fish was uncovered. They said to 'Īsā ﷺ, "We will believe only if you can make that fish come back to life ..." And 'Īsā ﷺ stretched out his hand, and the fish began to live and wriggle towards the water, then it lay down again and was fried fish as before.

After three days had passed, the table came no more. The Muslims among the Jews believed, while the hypocrites, in spite of all warnings, still found no faith in their heart and attributed the miracle to magic. When they awoke the next morning, the chastisement of Allah was upon them: they were changed into pigs and monkeys, and took off into the hills and were never heard of again. They were made sterile and perished in the wilderness.

Allah punished two groups of the Banī Isrā'īl by changing them into beasts: as we have heard, one in the time of 'Īsā ﷺ, when they disbelieved in the Table sent down to them from the heavens, and Allah Almighty turned them into swine, and one group was turned into apes when they broke the Sabbath.

136 – THE SABBATH-BREAKERS

CONCERNING THE SABBATH-BREAKERS it is related:

"*And question them concerning the township which was bordering the sea, when they transgressed the Sabbath, when their fish came to them on the day of their Sabbath, swimming shorewards, but on the day they kept not the Sabbath, they came not unto them. Even so We were trying them for their ungodliness.*" [The Battlements, 7:163]

The commentators interpret this verse in the following ways:

In the time of Sulaymān ﷺ there was a village by the sea between Madyan and Shām. Allah had forbidden these Jews to go out fishing on the Sabbath and had made the fish safe from persecution on that day. The fish were well aware of this, and they came swimming close to the coast on Saturdays, while on

other days they swam only in the deep water out at sea, and no fish was ever seen swimming in the shallows. In the same way it is known to the animals living within the sacred precincts of the *ḥaram* at Mecca that they will not be harmed there, as it is forbidden to hunt or otherwise take life within certain borders, and animals that would otherwise shy away from men, live there in peace. Everyone who has been to Mecca has noted that the doves around the Ka'ba do not fly away from men, and that animals that are hunted will flee into the sacred precincts within the *mīqāt* and seek safety there. This is a sign that the beasts also receive inspiration from their Lord, Allah Almighty, for no one has told them of these facts; indeed, who knows their language? It is a direct communication from the Lord of all created beings, and they are capable of receiving it. So it was with the fish of that time and place, they swam close to the shore on the Sabbath days while at all other times they hid themselves in the deep of the sea.

The people of this village grew discontented and possessed by greed, and they thought up a way of outwitting the fish, without openly breaking their law. But the Lord hears and sees all our secret intentions. They began to dig out hollows and pools by the seashore, which they could close off by curtains of nets. The fish then swam in on the Sabbath, and when they tried to swim out into the open sea after nightfall, they found that they were trapped. Thus they remained in those basins, and in the morning, on the Sunday, the men came down and scooped them out with great ease, making light of this and saying, "We have not broken the Sabbath, we are fishing out on a Sunday ..."

This practice continued into the time of King Sulaymān's عليه السلام successor and son Rehoboam. There was no prophet among them at the time, but there were wisemen and learned scholars of the Torah who earnestly counselled against this deceitful practice. "Abandon your crooked ways, for you will incur the Wrath of Allah." No one paid any attention to their advice, indeed there were others who said to them:

"*Why do you admonish a people Allah is about to destroy or to chastise with a terrible chastisement?*" [The Battlements, 7:164]

But these Rabbis replied, "It is our duty to exhort them and tell them that they are doing wrongful deeds, otherwise we too shall be guilty of their transgression." If a person sins or commits a wrong and a man of knowledge is aware of this, then he must try to prevent him with his advice. If the man listens, it is good; if not, then at least the person who tried to counsel him against evil is free of blame. There is no better kind of worship than for believers to befriend one another, "*bidding to honour and forbidding dishonour,*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:114] and this is the best performance of piety.

This duty is incumbent on each class of human society, and of these there are three: the rulers, the learned, and the commoners. The ruler is obliged to forbid by law all unlawful things, and his command may be carried out by force. Who disobeys the law is punished. The learned person is duty-bound to prevent unlawfulness by his speech and his advice. The common people may prevent unlawfulness by the disapproval of their hearts: it is not given to them to command with authority nor to give learned advice, but they can prevent evil by their hearts' displeasure and censure. Allah has not charged them with a great responsibility, but everyone must carry out that belonging to his station.

The Rabbis said, "We have done our duty by Allah, and hope to attain the Lord's pardon." As for the transgressors of the Sabbath:

"*So, when they forgot that they were reminded of, We delivered those who were forbidding wickedness, and We seized the evildoers with evil chastisement for their ungodliness. And when they turned in disdain from that forbidding We said to them, 'Be you apes, miserably slinking!'*" [The Battlements, 7:165–166]

After they had been warned they yet continued in their misguided fishing for a year or two, then the punishment of Allah seized them. Some say they were striken and at first deprived of their power of speech, then they were turned into apes. They lived like that for seven days, then they died. And Allah has Power and Knowledge over all things, hidden and manifest.

137 – FROM THE MANĀQIB OF ʿĪSĀ عليه السلام

ABŪ SAʿĪD AL-KHUDRĪ related: ʿĪsā عليه السلام used to wear a wide hair cloak, *abā* and lived mostly on wild vegetables and herbs. Once he ate nothing at all for sixty days. One day he remembered to eat some bread and on that day he found no taste in his devotions.

ʿĪsā عليه السلام had very white skin and a reddish complexion. He wore his hair long and walked barefoot. He wore neither silver nor gold, and had no part of the treasures of this world; he was abstinent all his life, and did not marry.

KAʿB AL-AḤBĀR رضي الله عنه relates:

The Lord spoke to ʿĪsā عليه السلام, saying, "O My Prophet, remember to repeat *bismillāh* much, for whoever says *bismillāh* has shown his loyalty to Me; and whoever shows loyalty to Me, I will reprieve him from hellfire and grant him paradise. For every *bismillāh* that a person repeats, I will write for him 100 *bismillāh* in My Presence."

It is related that one day ʿĪsā عليه السلام came by a high mountain on his travels. There he saw a white rock which drew his attention. He went up to it and prayed to the Lord to reveal to him its secret. The Lord heard his prayer and by Divine Power the rock split open. Inside it ʿĪsā عليه السلام beheld an old shaykh of venerable appearance standing at prayer. Beside him grew a green vine upon which hung a bunch of fresh grapes. ʿĪsā عليه السلام asked the Lord in his heart for how long this shaykh had been praying in the rock, and he was told, "For four hundred years." He also learned that he received provision from his Lord every day, a bunch of grapes. ʿĪsā عليه السلام then said, "Surely, O Allah, there is no one more honoured in Your Presence, than this old pir who lives for Your sake alone and whom You supply from Your never-ending Bounty." "O ʿĪsā," replied the Lord, "more honoured than this *pir* is one of the nation of My Beloved Muḥammad who rises to pray on the night of the fifteenth of Shaʿbān, the night of Barā'a."

One day ʿĪsā عليه السلام passed by a grave wherein he perceived a person being grievously punished by the avenging angels. ʿĪsā

ﷺ cried to the Lord, "Why, my Lord, is this man suffering so much?" The Lord spoke to 'Īsā ﷺ and said, "This person was a great sinner, therefore his punishment is harsh." A few days later 'Īsā ﷺ happened to be passing by the same spot, and he saw that the grave had turned into a garden of paradise and the same person was enjoying all its delights. He asked, "O Allah, what is the secret of this?" Allah answered him and said, "When this young man died, he left behind a pregnant wife. Now his child is seven years old, and they have taken him to the mosque to be taught. His teacher said to him, 'Recite: *Bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm!* When he recited the *basmala* once, I said to My angels, 'Stop punishing this child's father and prepare a paradise garden for him in his grave. For it is not befitting of My Glory and Majesty that I should punish the parent under the earth while his child is reciting My Holy Name for My sake in this world ...'"

Three people benefit from the recital of the *basmala*: the father, the mother and the teacher of the person saying *Bismi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm* ...

138 – FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE INJĪL

Ṣaḥib al-Qasab said: The Torah contained many legal judgements, *aḥkām*, while the Injīl consisted mainly of moral exhortation and allegory. Among other things it says:

If a person is wronged and asks for forgiveness for him who has wronged him, he has gained a victory over the armies of Shayṭān.

Allah says: "No one is as dear to My Heart as the kind man: if a person wrongs him, he forgives him. If a person does not come to him, he goes to him. And if one treats him improperly, he shows him goodness; if one fails to return what he has borrowed, still he will pay him back his loan."

Allah says five things in the Injīl:

If you pray to Me, I will answer you;

If you are grateful for the Grace I have shown you, I will give you even more;

If you approach Me by alms-giving, I will approach you with My Mercy;

If you seek to draw near Me by asking forgiveness, I will surround you with it;

If you rely on Me and believe in Me with firm conviction, I will give you My succour in all your trials.

And it is written in the Injīl:

Woe upon a person who does not seek knowledge with all his means! For he will sit with the ignorant! Seek knowledge with all you have, for even if knowledge does not make you happy, it will not make you complain either; if it does not elevate your station, neither will it abase you; if it does not enrich you, neither will it make you poor; and if it does not profit you, at least it will do you no harm. Never say, 'I am afraid of gaining knowledge, for perhaps I may know much and yet be unable to act upon it' — no, say rather: 'I shall try to learn as much as I can and base my actions on my knowledge.'

MUQĀTIL IBN SULAYMĀN said: "I read in the Injīl that Allah spoke to ʿĪsā عليه السلام and said, 'Respect and hold in high regard the *'ulamā'* (men of learning), and know well their worth. For after the prophets and messengers I have created none more excellent than the *'ulamā'*. Their virtue, compared to that of the common people, is like the sun among all the other stars. And it is like the life of the hereafter compared to this world, and like My Excellence compared to that of the entire creation.'"

ʿĪsā عليه السلام is said to have told his teachers:

"O you men of knowledge, lacking in religious commitment! Refrain from what you have not been ordered to do, and keep silent about what you do not know! Your likeness is that of a stone placed in a watercourse: it hinders the flow of water. Neither does it drink itself, nor does it permit the water to reach others so that they might drink."

And ʿĪsā عليه السلام said:

"You are not afraid of sin, whereas all the prophets feared sinfulness as much as they feared unbelief. The likeness of a useless scholar who does not act upon his knowledge is that of a woman who commits adultery in secret; but when she falls

pregnant, her sin becomes apparent. So the scholar who lives not according to what he knows will be exposed before the Divine Court on the Day of Judgement, and he will be shamed before the Almighty."

'Īsā ﷺ said:

"Give no words of wisdom to the ignorant, for you will be doing wrong. And do not withhold wisdom from those capable of receiving it, for then too you will be doing wrong."

'Īsā ﷺ said to the Ḥawāriyyūn:

"Do not desire the riches of the people of worldliness, for if you had these possessions, perhaps you would lose the light of faith."

One day the Ḥawāriyyūn said to 'Īsā ﷺ, "How is it that you can walk upon the water, while we cannot?" 'Īsā ﷺ replied, "It is because you give value to gold and silver and precious stones, while for me that is all the same as ordinary stones and minerals. Therefore I walk upon the water and it carries me."

And 'Īsā ﷺ said to the Ḥawāriyyūn, "O you who would amass fortunes in this world, no good will come of that to you! The only good thing you can do is to turn your backs on them!"

The Ḥawāriyyūn asked, "O 'Īsā, who are the saints?" 'Īsā ﷺ answered, "The common people regard the outer form of this world; the saints are those who look at its hidden aspects, and who forget the world and all that is in it from their remembrance of the Lord of the Worlds in every moment.Do not taste of this world, for if you do you will become its slave. Regard this world as a place where you may take your lessons, and not as an abode of permanence."

One day 'Īsā ﷺ passed a man lying on the ground. "Get up," he said to him, "and say your prayers." "I have already prayed," answered the man, "only then did I lie down to sleep." "How have you worshipped the Lord?" asked 'Īsā ﷺ. "I have left the world to the people of worldliness and have renounced all possessions." "If that is so," said 'Īsā ﷺ, "then go to sleep in peace, for you have performed your worship well."

It is related that 'Īsā ﷺ turned his back on the world and its concerns and went to worship on a distant mountain top. He

met there a person praying fervently to Allah. He asked the man, "How long have you already spent here in prayer?" The man answered, "I have been here for eight years; but, O prophet of Allah, please pray for me that the Lord might grant me an atom of His Love ..." ʿĪsā عليه السلام prayed for him and left that place.

Some time later he returned to that spot and the man was no longer there. ʿĪsā عليه السلام called to the Lord, "O Lord, where has Your servant gone?" The Lord answered ʿĪsā عليه السلام and spoke, "O ʿĪsā, when We give Our Love to a person, We cause in him complete abandon. If you want to see him go to such-and-such a valley and ask for him." ʿĪsā عليه السلام went to that place and called the man thrice by his name, but received no answer. The Lord then addressed ʿĪsā عليه السلام, saying, "O ʿĪsā, even if you hacked this servant of Mine to pieces, he would not turn from Me to you." ʿĪsā عليه السلام then wept and said, "O my Lord, please give to me also a part or an atom of Your Perfect Love." The Lord answered, "O ʿĪsā, the perfection of Love resides in the heart of My Beloved, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā ﷺ, who is to come after you ..."

One day the Ḥawāriyyūn said to ʿĪsā عليه السلام, "Is there anybody on this earth who resembles you?" "Yes," replied ʿĪsā عليه السلام, "there is. A person whose speech consists of the remembrance of Allah, and whose silence is meditation, and the very sight of whom is a lesson. Would that I were that very person!" The Ḥawāriyyūn said to ʿĪsā عليه السلام, "O Prophet of Allah, give us permission to build a house so that we might worship the Lord in it." ʿĪsā عليه السلام said, "Go and build a house upon the water." "But," they replied, "a building cannot stand firm upon the waters." "Yes," said ʿĪsā عليه السلام, "in the same way your worship cannot stand firm as long as you remain concerned with worldly affairs."

From KAʿB AL-AḤBĀR:

The Lord said to ʿĪsā عليه السلام, "Go to a certain place that is called Vak-Vak, and remind the people there that I am the Lord, their God, for they eat of what I provide for them, but they adore other gods besides Me. For that I would punish them with hell-fire, but for seven characteristics that are found among these people." "And what are these seven qualities, o My Lord?" inquired ʿĪsā عليه السلام. The Lord answered, "The first is this: they

respect their elders and help and serve them; the second: their women have an affectionate attitude towards their men, the men are kind and merciful towards their women, and their children are educated well; thirdly, they tell no lies; fourthly, they content themselves with little and do not complain of penury; fifthly, they keep their word when they have given it; sixth, they do not measure with forged weights, and seventh, whatever they are given for safekeeping they look after honestly and do not betray the owner's trust. Whoever has these seven qualities, him I will not throw into Hell."

"However, if there is a Muslim people who are deficient in three qualities they will be written in the book of the hypocrites. Firstly, if they are in the habit of telling lies; secondly, if they break their word after they have given it; and thirdly, if they betray the trust placed in their care. For in their heart there remains yet the darkness of disbelief, if these three qualities are present. Go now, My prophet, to Vak-Vak, for the people there are ready to accept the truth, so call them to it."

139 – THE STORY OF THE ENVOYS TO ANTAKYA AND ḤABĪB AN-NAJJĀR

MUḤAMMAD IBN JARĪR relates:

'Īsā ﷺ sent off two of his companions to Antakya to preach to people there who were known to be a very wild and rebellious lot. He gave them a staff, a prayer mat, and a turban of his, and they were also given certain powers to work miracles, in order to convince people of their mission. The first person they met in that region was a shepherd in the fields, by name Ḥabīb an-Najjār. He was a good man and showed kindness to the wayfarers. They told him of their mission, but he said, "In Antakya there is not a man who will believe you. Myself, I have a wife and five sons. One of my children is afflicted with madness, perhaps if you can heal him, my family will believe in you." They went with Ḥabīb to his house, and were welcomed by his family. They were shown the insane boy, and they laid

down the staff in front of the prayer mat, placed the turban on their head and prayed towards Jerusalem. Then they blew on the child, making supplication for him, and by the grace of Allah, all signs of madness departed from him. He rose, went to his parents and kissed their hands, and those of ʿĪsā's disciples, and his mind was restored. The whole family then believed in the messengers, and went out to tell their neighbours of the miracle that had occurred in their house. But people were all appalled at the mention of a single, invisible God, and reviled them and made a mockery of the messengers. Word of these things came to the king of the town, and without much hesitation he had the two messengers thrown in prison where they languished for a while.

After some time ʿĪsā عليه السلام sent a third disciple, Shamʿūn (Simon), after them. He came to Antakya disguised as one of their priests. He was of gentle speech and of a pleasant disposition, so that people instantly loved him, and he even gained the favour of their king. The king grew fond of him very quickly, and befriended him, and would not be without his company. One day Shamʿūn spoke before the assembled court and said, "I have heard that some time before I arrived there came to you two men who spoke of a new prophet and a new religion. Whatever became of them?" "Oh," said the king, who had quite forgotten the two messengers, "they must be in the dungeons, if they are still alive, that is ..." The two prisoners were fetched, and they were almost unrecognizable in their filth and miserable, starved condition, but they recognized their companion Shamʿūn of an instant. "What is your crime?" he asked them. "We were arrested for giving sight to the blind, and strength to walk to the lame," they replied, "for we were given these powers of healing by our prophet ʿĪsā عليه السلام before we were sent here." "Can you show us this miracle to substantiate your claims?" asked Shamʿūn.

A person was brought before the court who had been blind from birth, whose face showed no trace of anything resembling an eye; all was as flat as his forehead. The two prisoners again prayed towards Jerusalem, then they each formed a little ball

of clay and placed it over the face of the sightless man, and, lo and behold, a pair of eyes opened in that place, and they were the most large and beautiful eyes that anyone had ever seen, and the man saw, by the leave of Allah Almighty. Everyone marvelled at this miracle, and they brought yet another blind person, to whom they did the same. The king was most amazed of all, and asked his servants, "Are our priests able to do such a thing?" "Of course they are," his courtiers answered him, not willing to admit any deficiency in their ranks.

Next they asked the prisoners to revive the dead, if they expected to be believed. Recently the young son of one of the great ministers had died of a fever, and the boy, though dead for seven days, was yet unburied, according to their custom. The body was rapidly decomposing, and no one could approach it on account of the awful stench. They sent 'Īsā's companions to the place where they prayed as before and by the Grace of Allah, life returned to the body. The boy sat up and pronounced, "*Lā ilāha illā llāh, 'Īsā rasūlullāh,*" then he turned and spoke to his people thus: "O my father, my king, my dear friends! Do you think my rotting body has been revived through the power of your idols when you are all holding your noses from the stench of decay? No, never, all your beliefs are false and misguided! If only you knew what I have suffered during these seven days since I died! I have seen and endured the tortures of hell and I have been through indescribable misery and torment, and would be enduring them still, were it not for the coming of these three blessed messengers." "Oh," said the king, "I know only of two; who then is the third?" and he looked around full of suspicion. The boy pointed to the two prisoners, and to the third man, Sham'ūn, who had become the friend of the king, and who had spoken "Amīn" every time 'Īsā's عليه السلام companions had prayed and worked miracles. Immediately the king had them seized, and the boy lay down and was dead again.

The three companions were thrown to the mob who began to beat and revile them in every possible way, and they would surely have killed them, had not at that very moment a man come running from the other end of the town, crying,

"Stop! Stop! What you are doing is injustice and a gross sin! These men are innocent, they have done no one any harm, and they are working not for any gain in this life, but for the reward of the life to come along, and for the pleasure of the Lord Almighty, Allah the One and Only Living God ..." They no sooner heard these words from Ḥabīb an-Najjār (for it was he) than they let off beating the three messengers and turned all their fury on Ḥabīb and beat him to death. Then they trampled his mutilated body and hung it upon the ramparts of the city walls, so that every one could see what would happen to those who forsook the king's religion. But during the night, the angels came and removed the battered remains and brought Ḥabīb's soul into paradise gardens. When Ḥabīb beheld the splendours of paradise, he called out, "Ah, woe upon my people, had they only known how my Lord would honour me, and that I have not been forsaken or forgotten ..." And he cried and lamented for their ignorance, and prayed for them, in spite of all they had done to him.

Meanwhile, back in Antakya, the Wrath of the Lord overtook the unbelievers. By Allah's Command, the angel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام cupped his mouth with both his hands and let out one great cry which left all living beings in Antakya lifeless and broken; all except the three messengers who picked up and betook themselves elsewhere.

This tale is told in full in the Holy Qur'ān in Sura Yā Sīn:

"Strike for them a similitude — the inhabitants of the city, when the Envoys came to it when We sent unto them two men, but they cried them lies, so We sent a third as reinforcement.

They said, 'We are assuredly Envoys unto you.' They said, 'You are naught but mortals like us, the All-Merciful has not sent down anything. You are speaking only lies.'

They said, 'Our Lord knows We are Envoys unto you; and it is only for us to deliver the Manifest Message.' They said, 'We augur ill of you, If you give not over, we will stone you and there shall visit you from us a painful chastisement.'

They said, 'Your augury is with you; If you are reminded? But you are a prodigal people. Then came a man from the furthest part of the city,

running; he said, 'My people, follow the Envoys! Follow such as ask no wage of you, that are right-guided. And why should I not serve Him who originated me, and unto whom you shall be returned? What, shall I take, apart from Him, gods whose intercession, if the All-Merciful desires affliction for me shall not avail me anything, and who will never deliver me? Surely in that case I should be in manifest error! Behold, I believe in your Lord, therefore hear me!' It was said, 'Enter paradise!'

He said, 'Ah, would that my people had knowledge that my Lord has forgiven me and that He has placed me among the honoured.' And We sent not down upon his people, after him, any host out of heaven; neither would We send any down. It was only one Cry and lo, they were silent and still. Ah, woe for those servants! Never comes unto them a Messenger, but they mock at him. What, have they not seen how many generations We have destroyed before them, and that it is not unto them that they return? They shall every one of them be arranged before Us." [Yā Sīn, 36:13–32]

140 — 'ĪSĀ'S ﷺ ASCENSION

"*And they devised, and Allah devised, and Allah is the best of devisers.*" [The House of 'Imrān, 3:54]

"*And We gave 'Īsā, son of Maryam, the clear signs, and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit ...*" [The Cow, 2:87]

"*... yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty — no indeed; Allah raised him up to Him; Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.*" [The Women, 4:157–158]

'Īsā ﷺ travelled and preached to his people for three years (though some say it was ten), and his following began to grow among the Jews. But the priests and rabbis grew jealous of him, and reported his doings to the Roman overlords, saying that he was a sorcerer and a magician, and intent on rousing the rabble against them. The Romans feared another political revolt, and decided on his arrest and execution. They said to the Jews,

"Since you accuse him of breaking your laws, we hand him over to your jurisdiction; apply your laws to him then." ʿĪsā عليه السلام had at that time returned to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. He gathered with his disciples in a secret location, knowing that the Jews were looking to arrest him. He predicted his betrayal by one of his close companions, and all were very disturbed, since none knew whether it would be he. In the end one of them, Judas, went out, and was apprehended by the mob of persecutors and recognized as one of ʿĪsā's companions. They threatened to kill him, but promised to release him and pay him thirty silver pieces if he were to lead them to ʿĪsā's عليه السلام hideout. He accepted; Judas thus became the traitor.

The night passed. Judas led the Roman soldiers to the house and it was arranged that he should kiss ʿĪsā عليه السلام so that the foreign Romans could identify him. But when the soldiers suddenly broke upon the scene, there was such confusion that they succeeded in arresting the wrong men, for they found it hard to distinguish one Jew from the next. So ʿĪsā عليه السلام escaped. The man they had taken was bound and crucified in public. Some say it was the traitor Judas himself, or another of the number of hostile Jews. In the Qur'ān it is said that it certainly was not ʿĪsā عليه السلام, but one who was made to resemble him, so much so, that even his mother did not know him for sure. ʿĪsā عليه السلام however was taken by the Angel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام and raised up to heaven, as it is written in the Holy Qur'ān:

"*ʿĪsā, I will take thee to Me and will raise thee to Me, and I will purify thee of those who believe not.*" [The House of ʿImrān, 3:55]

After the crucifixion there was great confusion, for everyone was left in doubt as to who the dead man was. On the eighth day after his death, ʿĪsā's عليه السلام disciples, his mother and another woman were gathered in her house to mourn for their loss, when ʿĪsā عليه السلام suddenly appeared to them, mysteriously. He told them the truth of what had happened and how his Lord had raised him to the heavens where he would continue to live until the end of times when he would return to earth, and he gave them comfort. Then he asked for the traitor Judas. He was told that it was believed that he had despaired and taken his

own life with a knife. 'Īsā ﷺ said, "Ah, if only he had turned to Allah and begged for His forgiveness, Allah Almighty would have pardoned him and accepted his repentance. For there is no sin great enough that our Lord in His Infinite Mercy would not pardon." And he wept for him. Then he gave his disciples authority to continue preaching the Injīl, and blessed them and prayed with them until the dawn. He was then raised up again into the heavens. This night later came to be celebrated by the Christians as their highest holiday, and they call it Easter.

It is related that at the End of Times 'Īsā ﷺ will reappear and descend upon the White Minaret at Damascus, both his hands resting upon the shoulders of two angels. He will come down and meet Dajjāl at the Lat Gate near Jerusalem, and he will fight and kill him. But Dajjāl will only appear in the world after Sayyidinā al-Mahdī has come. Allah Almighty will make 'Īsā ﷺ the ruler of the world in the peace that will follow the Great War at the end of times and Sayyidinā al-Mahdī will be the Imam of the nation of Muḥammad ﷺ. 'Īsā ﷺ will then go to Mecca and Medina; he will marry an Arab girl and have children with her. After forty years he will die in Medina and will be buried in the space left vacant for him, between the tombs of Abū Bakr as-Siddīq ﷺ and Sayyidinā 'Umar ﷺ.

'ABDULLĀH IBN SALĀM says: It was written in the Torah that 'Īsā ﷺ will be buried in the same grave as Sayyidinā Muḥammad ﷺ. After 'Īsā's ﷺ disappearance from the world, Shayṭān the Accursed lost no time in sowing confusion in the hearts of men. He and his helpers began disseminating all sorts of mistaken opinion about his person, some of which are prevalent to this very day. They implied that 'Īsā ﷺ was the son of Allah, that his mother Maryam had been raised to partake in the Divine identity, or that 'Īsā ﷺ was Allah Himself, incarnate on earth. They said Allah had divided into three separate, yet indivisible personalities, and for centuries they have made people believe that one equals three. All of these opinions are denounced by the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān where Allah Almighty says:

"Such was ʿĪsā, son of Maryam; this is a statement of the Truth concerning which they doubt. It does not befit Allah that He should take to Himself a son. Glory be to Him!" [Maryam, 19:34–35]

And also:

"The Masīḥ, ʿĪsā, son of Maryam, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed to Maryam; and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and do not say 'Three' — Stop! It is better for you. Allah is only One God. It is far removed from His transcendent Majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and in the earth, and Allah is enough as Defender. The Masīḥ will never scorn to be a slave to Allah, nor will the favoured angels ..." [The Women, 4:171–172]

And:

"They surely disbelieve who say: 'Lo! Allah is the Masīḥ, son of Maryam.' The Masīḥ said, 'O Banī Isrā'īl, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.' Lo! whoever ascribes partners to Allah, for him Allah has forbidden the Garden. His abode is the Fire. For evil-doers there will be no helpers. They surely disbelieve who say: Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the one God, Allah." [The Table, 5:72–73]

141 — MARYAM'S DEATH AND THE MARTYRDOM OF YAḤYĀ عليه السلام

AFTER ʿĪSĀ'S عليه السلام DISAPPEARANCE from the world, the Ḥawāriyyūn spread out and preached as ʿĪsā عليه السلام had ordered them to. His mother Maryam did not live long after her son had gone from the world, she died after a few years and was buried by ʿĪsā's عليه السلام disciples.

Now before all these events came to pass, Yaḥyā عليه السلام the prophet was beheaded on Herod's orders. King Herod knew Yaḥyā عليه السلام to be a holy man, and he loved and feared him at once. He would have him come to the palace when he would come and listen to his preachings. He would weep long and ardently, then he would continue to sin. Yaḥyā عليه السلام always spoke to him the plain words of truth, and feared not for his life, even though Herod was king. Herod had married the wife of his

brother, Herodias by name. She had a very beautiful daughter, Salomé, and when she came of age, Herod was striken with love for her, and wished to marry her as well. Now this was not lawful on two accounts: firstly, she was his niece, and secondly, it is not permitted to be married to a mother and daughter at one and the same time. Yaḥyā ﷺ told him so whenever he was summoned to the palace. The king was angered at him because of this, and had him thrown in prison for a time.

One day a great banquet was held at the palace, in honour of the King's birthday, and it went on for days. Each day Herod had promised to fulfill one wish for the girl Salomé with whom he was so infatuated. Salomé came out that evening, dressed in a gown of seductive splendour, and she danced before the king who was already half-drunk, until she made him mad with desire. He bade her sit by him, and asked her to name her wish. She replied, echoing her mother's request, that she wished for nothing else but the head of Yaḥyā on a silver platter. Now Herod was appalled, but he was no longer in his right mind, besides he was shamed before his guests who had heard him give his word; so he had Yaḥyā ﷺ called to him and demanded that he perform a marriage ceremony for him on the spot. Yaḥyā ﷺ replied as before, "No, she is not lawful to you, I cannot make her lawful either." Thereupon Herod was so enraged that he gave orders for Yaḥyā ﷺ to be beheaded, and for the girl's wish to be fulfilled. The order was carried out, and Yaḥyā's head was carried in on a platter. When it was brought before Herod, the severed head suddenly spoke to him, saying, "No, Herod, she still is not lawful to you, desist!" and Herod was taken by a great fear and loathing and drove the girl from his side, and his heart was consumed with remorse.

It is related also that after Yaḥyā ﷺ was beheaded, blood kept flowing from his veins, and there was nothing they could do to stop this flow of blood. They heaped on him a great pile of earth, and still the bleeding would not stop. It flowed on and on till it formed a river. The soldiers came in fear to the king and told him of what went on. It is said that the blood only ceased to flow after Herod himself went to the site, and throwing himself

upon his sword, drenched the earth with his own blood. But Allah knows best and He alone is the Giver and Taker of life.

May He grant peace and rest to that blessed soul.

It is related that because Yaḥyā عليه السلام was slaughtered like a sheep, on the Day of Judgement Death himself will be brought along in the shape of a bird. He will be placed exactly between heaven and hell. Then a knife will be given to Yaḥyā عليه السلام who will slit the throat of Death. A call will be heard from on high, calling, "See here! Death is being sacrificed, from now on there will be no more death! Death has existed only in this world, and will be no more in the world to come!"

Praised be He, the Lord Almighty Allah — the Eternal, Everlasting, Living God!

And Peace be upon His Prophets and Messengers, His elect and chosen servants,

The spiritual guides and benefactors of mankind,

and Blessings and Allah's Mercy upon their undying souls!

Amīn, Amīn, Amīn
wa min Allāh at-tawfīq

Appendix

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF ḤAJJA ĀMINA ʿĀDIL

HAJJA ĀMINA ʿĀDIL, born in Kazan in the former Tatar Soviet Republic in 1933 as the third of four children, had fled with her family from anti-Islamic repression, first from the Soviet Union to the region of Turkish Erzurum, then following the disruptive introduction of secularism, from Turkey to Damascus, Syria. There she met ʿAbdullāh ad-Daghistānī, the Grand Sheikh of the honourable Naqshbandī-Ṭarīqah, who arranged for the young woman to be married to his disciple and later successor Muḥammad Nāẓim ʿĀdil. She lived with him in the traditional setting of this *ṭarīqa*, following a tradition that goes back to Sayyidinā Abū Bakr ﷺ, the companion of the Prophet ﷺ, who carries the epithet *aṣ-ṣiddīq*, "the sincere one". The tales presented here bear the hallmark of credibility and are of special value.

From 1981, Hajja Āmina lived with her family in Lefke on the island of Cyprus. She accompanied her husband on his journeys throughout the world, until her death in 2004, may Allāh sanctify her soul.

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The most important extra-Qur'ānic sources are:

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